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1914

VANE'S STORY.

Ballantyne Press
BALLANTYNE, HANSON AND CO.
EDINBURGH AND LONDON

VANE'S STORY,
WEDDAH AND OM-EL-BONAIN,
AND OTHER POEMS.

BY

JAMES THOMSON,
AUTHOR OF "THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT."

LONDON:
REEVES AND TURNER, 196 STRAND.
1881.

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PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY
WITH THE
GRATITUDE AND LOVE AND REVERENCE
OF THE AUTHOR



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VANE'S STORY.

1864.



PROLOGUE.

THIS is the story
(To God be the glory !)
Which Vane, found in bed
When a splash of fierce red
From the sunset made strange
The street's opposite range,
Told me ; who, astonished,
Had firstly admonished,
Then asked him outright,
“ On the spree all last night ? ”
Pale looked he, and queer ;
But his speech calm and clear,
And his voice sweet and strong,
So swayed me ere long,
That I almost or quite
Believed him that night.

He named not the hall
Where he went to the ball ;
Of his friends I could trace
None who knew of the case,
Nor the Jones, nor the Brown—
There are myriads in town !
The landlord avows
He went out with his spouse
After tea ; slept at Bow,
At her sister's.

And so,
Shall we trust Vane ? or deem
Him the dupe of a dream ?
Let who will decide.
The next week he died,
And thus ended his story.
(To God be the glory !)

THE STORY.

ONE flamelet flickered to and fro
Above the clear vermilion glow ;
The house was silent, and the street
Deserted by all echoing feet ;

And that small restless tongue of light
Possess my ear and mocked my sight,
While drowsy, happy, warm, I lay
* Upon the couch at close of day.
And drowsy, dreamy, more and more,
I floated from the twilight shore
Over the vague vast sea of sleep,
Just conscious of the rest so deep ;
Not sinking to the under caves,
But rocking on the surface waves.
When fitfully some muffled sound
Came from the crowded streets around.
It brought no thought of restless life
With wakeful care and passionate strife ;
But seemed the booming of a bell
Sweetly ringing tumult's knell,
Slowly chiming far away
The euthanasia of the day.
And then unsummoned by my will
Came floating through this mood so still
The scenes of all my life's past range,
In perfect pictures, fair and strange,
As flowers limned in purest light
Upon a background such as might

* Here for decorum be it said,
This couch was sofa and not bed.

Expand beneath some forest-screen
After the sunset, goldbrowngreen.
And then I heard on every side
The shadowy rustling slow and wide
Of night's dim curtains softly drawn
To hush the world asleep till dawn.
I heard the rustling, and my eyes
Were curtained with the curtained skies ;
And I lay wrapt as in a fleece
Of warmth and purity and peace ;
While consciousness within the stream
Of rippling thought and shadowy dream
Sank slowly to the deepest deep,
Lured by the murmuring Siren, sleep ;
When suddenly a little thrill
Of splendour pricked both mind and will,
And brought me tidings grand and strange ;
I did not stir with outward change,
But felt with inward royal mirth,
*On all this dusk of heaven and earth
The moon may rise or not to-night ;
But in my soul she rises bright !*

The globe of glory swelling rose
In mighty pulses, solemn throes ;

And filled and overflowed me soon
With light and music, with the swoon
Of too much rapture and amaze,
A murmurous hush, a luminous haze.
How long in this sweet swoon I lay,
What hours or years, I cannot say ;
Vast arcs of the celestial sphere
Subtend such little angles here.
But after the ineffable,
This first I can remember well :
A Rose of Heaven, so dewy-sweet
Its fragrance was a soul complete,
Came, touched my brow, caressed my lips,
And then my eyes in their eclipse ;
And still I stirred not, though there came
A wine of fire through all my frame,
An ecstasy of joy and love,
A vision of the throne above,
A myriad-voiced triumphant psalm
Upswelling through a splendour calm ;
Then suddenly, as if a door
Were shut, veiled silence as before.

The sweetest voice said, " True it is !
He does not waken at my kiss ! "

I smiled : “ Your kisses three and four
Just gave me Heaven, no less, no more ;
I held me still, eyes shut, lest bliss
Should overflow and waste a kiss.”

Then dreamily my lids I raised,
And with grand joy, small wonder, gazed ,
Although the miracle I saw
Might well have made me wan with awe.
“ Why have you left your golden hair,
These gorgeous dusky braids to wear ?
Why have you left your azure eyes,
To gaze through deep dark mysteries ?
Why have you left your robe of white,
And come in cloudy lace bedight ?
Or did you think that I could fail
To know you through whatever veil ?
As bird or beast, as fish or worm,
In fiendish or angelic form,
As flower or tree, as wave or stone,
Be sure I recognise My Own ! ”

The sweet sad voice was sad no more,
But sweeter, tenderer, than before ;
“ Oh, ask no questions yet,” said she,
“ But answer me, but answer me.

“ I now have listened very long
To catch some notes of that great song
Your youth began to sing so well ;
Oh, why have none yet reached me ? tell ! ”
“ And why is any lamp not bright,
With no more oil to feed its light ?
Why does a robe moth-eaten fade
When she is gone whom it arrayed ?
Great songs must pulse with lifeful breath,
No hymns mark time for timeless death ;
One long keen wail above the bier,
Then smothered moans, then stillness drear. ”

“ I long have listened, all aflame,
For some full echoes of the fame
Youth pledged ripe manhood to achieve :
Why must I, hearing none, still grieve ? ”
“ And why should he who cannot spend
Not make of gold his life's chief end ?
O Love, the jewels of renown,
So priceless in a monarch's crown,
What are they when his realm is lost,
And he must wander like a ghost
Alone through wilds of rocky dearth,
But pretty pebbles nothing worth ? ”

And would you have our love's proclaim
In shouts and trumpet-peals of fame ;
Or whispered, as I whisper here,
Into this little pink-shell ear
Still full of echoes from the sea
Of fathomless Eternity ? ”

“ I do not seek thy fame because
Enamoured of the world's applause,
Though even its most reckless shout
Involves some true love-praise no doubt :
But, Dearest, when fame's trumpets blare
Great hearts are battling with despair :
Better the tumult of the strife
Than stillness of lone-wasting life.
If you were working out God's will,
Could all the air around be still ? ”

“ But I am working out God's will
Alike when active and when still ;
And work we good or work we ill,
We never work against His will. . . .
All work, work, work ! Why must we toil
For ever in the hot turmoil ?

God wrought six days, and formed the world ;
Then on the seventh His power refulged,
And felt so happy that He blest
That Sabbath day above the rest ;
And afterwards, we read, He cursed
The work He thought so good at first ;
And surely Earth and Heaven evince
That He has done but little since.

* “ Well, I, who am a puny man,
And not a God who all things can,
Have also worked : not six short days
Of work refulgent with self-praise,
Of work ‘ all-good ’ whose end was blest
With infinite eternal rest :
No, I have worked life after life
Of sorrow, sufferance and strife,
So many ages, that I ask
To rest one lifetime from the task,
To spend these years (forlorn of thee)
Sequestered in passivity ;
Observing all things God hath made,
And of no ugliest truth afraid,

* The last chapter of George Sand's *Lélia* may seem to be the source of the following section : in fact, however, I chanced to read that work just after, and not before, this section was written.

But having leisure time enough
To look at both sides of the stuff. . . .
With Shelley to his ocean-doom,
With Dante to his alien tomb ;
With Wallace, Raleigh, Sidney, Vane,
All to the axe's bloody stain ;
With Socrates until the cup
Of hemlock lifted calmly up,
With Jesus to the fatal tree
After the garden's agony,
With Mohammed in flight and fight,
With Burns in all his fate's deep night,
With Joan to the fiery screen,
With Charlotte to the guillotine,
With Campanella all the while
And Tasso in their dungeons vile,
With Swift slow-dying from the top,
With Rabelais to the curtain's drop,
Cervantes prisoner and slave,
Columbus on the unknown wave,
And Luther through his lifelong war ;
With these, and with how many more,
Since poor Eve fell, and as she fell
Of course pulled Adam down as well,—
In these, and in how many more,
Have I outbattled life's stern war,

Endured all hardships, toiled and fought,
Oppressed, sore-wounded, and distraught,
While inwardly consumed with thought ;
How long ! how long !—Mankind no whit
The better for the whole of it !
And *I*, look at me, do I need
The little rest I claim, indeed,
With body dwindled, brain outworn,
Soul's pith dried up, and heart forlorn? . . .
And so I rest me, half-content
That all my active power is spent :
No new campaign till after cure !
Meanwhile I passively endure
The wounds bequeathed by so much strife,
The hopelessness of present life :
And this is much ; what further can
Be looked for from a wreck of man ?
I bear in silence and alone
What maddened me at first, I own."

*"The wounds bequeathed by so much strife,
The hopelessness of present life."*

She dwelt upon these words again
With such a look of wistful pain
As made my heart all creep and stir
With pity, not for self, for her.

“O my true Love !” she said (the while
Her poor lips sought and failed to smile),
“O Love ! your laugh is like a knell ;
Your phantasy is horrible,
Thus calmly plunged a glittering knife
Into the core of your own life !”
And there she broke down ; all the grief,
Love, pity powerless for relief,
Yearning to suffer in my stead,
Revulsion against fatal dread,
Long swelling mighty in her soul
O’erflooded now beyond control.
She gave a little laughing cry,
Choked sharply off ; then heavily
Flung herself down upon my breast
With passionate weeping unrepres ;
A night-dark cloud upon some bleak
And thunder-furrowed mountain peak
Pouring itself in rain and fire ;
For now through all the black attire
Heaving about her heaving frame
Fermented flashes of swift flame ;
Not tempest-lightnings, but indeed
Auroral splendours such as speed
Battling with gloom before the day,
And herald its triumphant sway.

Her instincts in that mighty hour
Of insurrection grasped at power ;
And her true self arrayed in light,
Azure and golden, dazzling-bright,
Was struggling through the mask of night.

The mask remained,—for some good cause
Well emphasised by Heavenly laws ;
She sobbed herself to self-control,
Represt the heavings of her soul ;
Then stood up, pallid, faint, distraught,
Facing some phantom of dread thought.

“ Another spasm like this,” I said,
“ Will kill me ! When we both are dead
I'll use my very first new breath
To thank you for the blissful death,
The torture-rapture utterless,
You dear life-giving murderess ! ”
I laughed ; and yet the while I gazed
Upon her standing wan and dazed :
Would I had bitten out my tongue
Ere any word of mine had stung

With such an unforeboded smart
That purest and most loving heart !

“ And do you never kneel and pray
For comfort on your lonely way ?
And have you no firm trust in God
To lighten your so-heavy load ? ”
The voice how strange and sad ! the mien
How troubled from its pure serene !
“ You good Child ! I beseech no more
That one and one may make up four,
When one and one are my assets
And four the total of my debts :
Nor do I now with fervour pray
To cast no shadow in broad day :
Nor even ask (as I asked once)
That laws sustaining worlds and suns
In their eternal path should be
Suspended, that to pleasure me
Some flower I love,—now drooping dead,
May be empowered to lift its head.”

“ Ah, good pure souls have told me how
You laughed at prayer as you laugh now,
And turned all holy things to mirth,
And made a mock of heaven and earth ;

And sometimes seemed to have no faith
In God, in true life after death.”
“ But God exists, or not, indeed,
Quite irrespective of our creed ;
We live, or live not, after death,
Alike whatever be our faith ;
And not a single truth, in brief,
Is modified by our belief.
And if God *does* subsist and act,
Though some men cannot learn the fact,
Who but Himself has made mankind,
Alike the seërs and the blind ?
It may be that for some good cause
He loves to rest deep-veiled in laws ;
And better likès us who don't ask
Or seek to get behind the mask,
Than those our fellow-insect fry
Who creep and hop and itch and pry,
The Godhead's lice, the swarming fleas
In Jove's great bed of slumbrous ease? ”

“ They said you scorned all wise restraints,
And loved the sinners, not the saints ;
And mocking these, still dwelt with those
The friends who are the worst of foes.”

“They told you something like the truth,
These dear tale-bearers full of ruth.
How proffer mere coarse human love
To hearts sole-set on things above ?
And furthermore, although of old
Wolves ravaged dreadfully the fold,
Yet now Christ's tender lambs indeed
Securely frisk, unstinted feed.
To us poor goats they freely give
The dreariest tracts, but they—they live
In pastures green, by rivers clear,
Quite sleek and happy even here :
And when these lambs that frisk and leap
Are all staid, stout, and well-clothed sheep,
The shepherd, having taken stock,
Will lead away the whole white flock
To bleat and batten in galore
Of Heavenly clover evermore !
The dear saints want no earthly friend,
Having their Jesus : but, perpend ;
What of the wild goats ? what of us,
A hundred times more numerous,
Poor devils, starving wretched here
On barren tracts and wild rocks drear,
And in the next life (as they tell)
Roasted eternally in Hell ?”

“But when you join the multitude
Of sinners, is it for their good ;
To hale them from the slough of sin,
Or but to plunge your own soul in?”
“And what they are, must I not be ?
The dear Lord made them Who made me ?
If God *did* make us, this is sure,
We all are brothers, vile and pure.
I've known some brilliant saints who spent
Their lives absorbed in one intent,
Salvation each of his own soul ;
The race they ran had just one goal,
And just one modest little prize ;
A wicket-gate in Paradise,
A sneaking-in there through the wall
To bliss eternal ; that was all.
Some of them thought this bliss would too
Be spiced by the contrasting view
Of Hell beneath them surging crammed
With all the tortures of the damned.
Their alms were loans to poor God lent,
Interest infinity-per-cent.,
(And God must be hard-up indeed
If of such loans He stands in need) ;
Their earnest prayers were coward cries,
Their holy doctrines blasphemies ;

Their faith, hope, love, no more, no less,
Than sublimated selfishness.

“ Now my gross, earthly, human heart
With man and not with God takes part ;
With men, however vile, and not
With Seraphim I cast my lot :
With those poor ruffian thieves, too strong
To starve amidst our social wrong,
And yet too weak to wait and earn
Dry bread by honest labour stern ;
With those poor harlots steeping sin
And shame and woe in vitriol-gin :
Shall these, so hardly dealt with here,
Be worse off in a future sphere ;
And I, a well-fed loungeur, seek
To ‘ cut ’ them dead, to cringe and sneak
Into that bland *beau monde* the sky,
Whose upper circles are so high ? . . .
If any human soul at all
Must die the second death, must fall
Into that gulph of quenchless flame
Which keeps its victims still the same,
Unpurified as unconsumed,
To everlasting torments doomed ;

Then I give God my scorn and hate,
And turning back from Heaven's gate
(Suppose me got there!) bow, *Adieu!*
Almighty Devil, damn me too!"*

As lightnings from dusk summer skies,
Mirth dazzled from her brow and eyes ;
A charming chiming silvery laughter
Accompanied my speech, and after
Still tinkled when the speech was done
Its symphony of faëry fun :
And then her lips superbly smiled.
" *You* are the child, the naughty child,
Screaming and kicking on its back,
And choking with convulsions black,
At these old-bogey tales of Hell
Its hard-pressed priestly nurses tell !"
And gaylier, sweetlier yet she laughed,
Till I was drunken, dizzy, daft.

* This was written before Mr. J. S. Mill published a similar declaration. It will be noticed, however, that while the philosopher treated the matter with his habitual lofty earnestness, the flippant rhymester but makes it a subject for mockery and laughter.

“ You wicked holy one ! ” I cried,
 “ You changeling seraph ! you black-eyed
 Black-hearted scoffer ! Heaven itself
 Has only made you worse, mad elf,

* * * *
 * * *
 * * * *

Well, I confess that I deserve
 Your arrowy laugh, your lip's grand curve,
 For foaming out in such a rage
 Of boyish nonsense at my age,
 Anent this stupid Hell and Heaven
 Some half-believe one day in seven.
 Let all who stickle for a Hell
 Have it ; they deserve it well. . .
 Not often in these latter years
 Am I, my darling, moved to tears
 Or joyous laughter or hot scorn,
 While plodding to the quiet bourne ;
 'Tis you have brought me back a part
 Of my old youthful passionate heart.”

“ And do you feel no bitter grief
 Of penitence for unbelief ?

No stings of venomous remorse
In tracing backward to its source
This wicked godless lifetime's course ? ”

“ I half remember, years ago,
Fits of despair that maddened woe,
Frantic remorse, intense self-scorn,
And yearnings harder to be borne
Of utter loneliness forlorn ;
What passionate secret prayers I prayed !
What futile firm resolves I made !
As well a thorn might pray to be
Transformed into an olive-tree ;
As well a weevil might determine
To grow a farmer hating vermin ;
The *I am that I am* of God
Defines no less a worm or clod.
My penitence was honest guile ;
My inmost being all the while
Was laughing in a patient mood
At this externe solicitude,
Was waiting laughing till once more
I should be sane as heretofore ;
And in the pauses of the fits
That rent my heart and scared my wits,

Its pleasant mockery whispered through,
Oh, what can Saadi have to do
With penitence? and what can you?
Are Shiraz roses wreathed with rue?

“Now tell me, ere once more we turn
To things which us alone concern,
Of all the prosperous saints you see
Has none a kindly word for me?”
“First SHELLEY, parting for above,
Left you a greeting full of love.”

“The burning Seraph of the Throne !
Not for my worship deep and lone
Of him, but for my love of you,
He loves and greets me ; in his view
I stand all great and glorified,
The bridegroom worthy of the bride
For whom the purest soul in Heaven
Might wait and serve long lifetimes seven,
And other seven when these were past,
Nor deem the service long at last,
Though after all he failed for ever
In his magnificent endeavour.”

“ Then that dear Friend of yours, who came
Uncouthly shrinking, full of shame,
Hopeless and desolate, at first,
Dismayed that he was not accurst ;
But when his essence shone out clear
Was found the noblest of our sphere ;
Beautiful, faithful, valiant, wise,
With tenderest love that may suffice
When once with equal power unfurled
To sway and bless a whole bad world :
Is it for my own sake that *he*
Bows down, Sir, half-adoring me ? ”

“ The great deep heart of purest gold,
Ever o'erflowing as of old
From the eternal source divine
With Heaven's most rich and cordial wine !
Enough : the loneliest on earth,
Famishing in affection's dearth,
Who found but two such friends above
Would banquet evermore on love.”

“ Now ask me what you wish to ask ;
Your slave is eager for her task.”
“ Then, firstly, I who never mix
With our vile nether politics

Have also ceased for many years
To study those of your high spheres.
Who now is, under God and Fate,
The Steward of the world-estate,
The Grand Vizier, Prime Minister,
Or (if you will) sole Manager
Of this bewildering Pantomime
Whose scenes and acts fill Space and Time ? ”

“ I have heard many and many a name ;
The laws seem evermore the same,
The operation of the laws
Reveals no variance in the cause.”

“ A learned politician, you !
Well, any name perchance will do ;
And we will take an old one, say
That Demiurgos still bears sway.
I want a prayer to reach his throne,
And you can bear it, you alone ;
For neither God nor fiend nor man
(Nay, scarcely any woman) can
Resist that voice of tenderest pleading,
Or turn away from it unheeding.

Not in this mystic mask of night,
But in your dazzling noonday light ;
Not with this silent storm of hair,
But crowned with sunbeams you shall fare ;
Not with these darkest Delphian eyes,
But with your luminous azure skies ;
For powers of solemn awe and gloom
Love loveliness and joy and bloom.
Only your voice you must not change ;
It is not, where all else is, strange ;
The sweetest voice in all the world,
The soul of cosmic music furred
In such a little slender sound,
Delighting in its golden bound ;
The evening star of melody,
The morning star of harmony ;
When I can catch its faintest tone
In sighing breeze, in dim wave's moan,
I feel you near, my Love, my Own."

"And who shall guide me to the throne
Whose place is unto all unknown?"

"By one at least the path is known :

* To Demogorgon's awful throne,

* *Prometheus Unbound*, act ii., scene 3, *et seq.*

Down, down, through all the mysteries
He led the Oceanides :
Where Demogorgon dwelleth deep
There Demiurgos watch doth keep,
Though Vesta sleeps æonian sleep :
SHELLEY himself shall be your guide,
Since I must still on earth abide :
Down, down, into the deepest deep ;
Down, down, and through the shade of sleep ;
Down, down, beyond the cloudy strife
Of interwoven death and life ;
Down, down, unto the central gloom
Whose darkness radiates through the tomb
And fills the universal womb.

“Then he shall leave thee lonely there,
And thou shalt kneel and make thy prayer,
A childish prayer for simple boon :
That soon and soon and very soon
Our Lady of Oblivious Death
May come and hush my painful breath,
And bear me thorough Lethe-stream,
Sleeping sweet sleep without a dream ;
And bring you also from that sphere
Where you grow sad without me, Dear ;

And bear us to her deepest cave
Under the Sea without a wave,
Where the eternal shadows brood
In the Eternal Solitude,
Stirring never, breathing never,
Silent for ever and for ever ;
And side by side and face to face,
And linked as in a death-embrace,
Leave us absorbing thus the balm
Of most divinely perfect calm,
Till ten full years have overflowed
For each wherein we bore the load
Of heavy life upon this earth
From birth to death from death to birth :
That when this cycle shall be past
We may wake young and pure at last,
And both together recommence
The life of passion, thought and sense,
Of fear and hope, of woe and bliss ;—
But in another world than this.

“For I am infinitely tired
With this old sphere we once admired,
With this old earth we loved too well ;
Disgusted more than words can tell,
And would not mind a change of Hell.

The same old stolid hills and leas,
The same old stupid patient trees,
The same old ocean blue and green,
The same sky cloudy or serene ;
The old two-dozen hours to run
Between the settings of the sun,
The old three hundred sixty-five
Dull days to every year alive ;
Old stingy measure, weight and rule,
No margin left to play the fool ;
The same old way of getting born
Into it naked and forlorn,
The same old way of creeping out
Through death's low door for lean and stout ;
Same men with the old hungry needs,
Puffed up with the old windy creeds ;
Old toil, old care, old worthless treasures,
Old gnawing sorrows, swindling pleasures :
The cards are shuffled to and fro,
The hands may vary somewhat so,
The dirty pack 's the same we know
Played with long thousand years ago ;
Played with and lost with still by Man,—
Fate marked them ere the game began ;
I think the only thing that 's strange
Is our illusion as to change.

“This is the favour I would ask :
Can you submit to such a task ?”

“All you have told me I will do,
Rejoicing to give joy to you :
Oh, I will plead, will win the boon,
That we may be united soon. . .
But sameness palls upon you so,
That to relieve you I will go.”

“By no means ! wait a little, Dear !
The change is in your being here.
Besides, I have not finished yet—
How stupid of me to forget !
Sh ! I shall think of it just now. . .
Your kiss, my Angel, on my brow !
Your kiss that through the dullest pain
Flashed inspiration on my brain !”

Her face was fulgent with clear bliss ;
She bent down o'er me with the kiss
As bends a dawn of golden light
To kiss away the earth's long night.
The splendour of her beauty made
Me blind, and in the rapturous shade

From head to foot my being thrilled
As if with mighty music filled,
To feel that kiss come leaning down
Upon me like a radiant crown.
Her royal kiss was on my brow
A burning ruby, burning now
As then, and burning evermore ;
A Star of Love above the roar
And fever of this life's long war :
And suddenly my brain was bright
With glowing fire and dancing light,
A rich intoxicating shine
Like wave on wave of noble wine,
The Alcahest of joy supreme
Dissolving all things into dream.

So when at length I found a tongue
Bell-clear and bold my voice outrung :
“ Dearest, all thanks were out of place
For this thine overwhelming grace.
The kiss of tenderness, the kiss
Of truth, you gave me erst ; but this
Is consecration ; to the man
Who wears this burning talisman
The veil of Isis melts away
To woven air, the night is day,

That he alone in all the shrine
May see the lineaments divine :
And Fate the marble Sphinx, dumb, stern,
Terror of Beauty cold, shall yearn
And melt to flesh, and blood shall thrill
The stony heart, and life shall fill
The statue ; it shall follow him
Submissive to his every whim,
Ev'n as the lion of the wild
Followed pure Una, meek and mild.

“Now, I can tell you what we two
Before we part this night will do.
There is a dance—I wish it were
Some brilliant night-fête rich and rare,
With gold-and-scarlet uniforms
Far-flashing through the music-storms ;
Some Carnival's last Masquerade,
Wherein our parts were fitly played.
This is another sort of thing,
The mere tame weekly gathering
Of humble tradesmen, lively clerks,
And fair ones who befit such sparks :
Few merry meetings could look duller ;
No wealth, no grandeur, no rich colour.

Yet they enjoy it : give a girl
Some fiddle-screech to time her twirl,
And give a youth the limpest waist
That wears a gown to hold embraced ;
Then dance, dance, dance ! both girl and boy
Are overbrimmed and drunk with joy ;
Because young hearts to love's own chime
Beat passionate rhythms all the time.

“This is the night, and we will go,
For many of the *Class* I know ;
Young friendly fellows, rather rough,
But frank and kind and good enough
For this bad world : how all will stare
To see me with a dark Queen there !
I went last winter twice or thrice,
As dull as lead, as cold as ice,
Amidst the flushed and vivid crowd
Of youths and maidens laughing loud ;
For thought retraced the long sad years
Of pallid smiles and frozen tears
Back to a certain festal night,
A whirl and blaze of swift delight,
When we together danced, we two !
I live it all again ! . . . Do you

Remember how I broke down quite
In the mere polka? . . . Dressed in white,
A loose pink sash around your waist,
Low shoes across the instep laced,
Your moonwhite shoulders glancing through
Long yellow ringlets dancing too,
You were an Angel then ; as clean
From earthly dust-speck, as serene
And lovely and beyond my love,
As now in your far world above.

“You shall this night a few more hours
Be absent from your heavenly bowers ;
With leave or not, 'tis all the same,
I keep you here and bear the blame.
Your Star this night must take its chance
Without you in the spheral dance,
For you shall waltz and whirl with me
Amidst a staidier companie ;
The Cherubim and Seraphim
And Saintly Hosts may drown their hymn
With tenfold noise of harp and lyre ;
The sweetest voice of all the quire
Shall sing to me, shall make my room,
This little nutshellful of gloom,

A Heaven of Heavens, the best of all,
While I am dressing for the Ball ! . . .

“ What book is this I held before,
The gloaming glooming more and more,
Eyes dreamed and hand drooped on the floor ?
The *Lieder*—Heine’s—what we want !
A lay of Heine’s you shall chant ;
Our poor Saint Heinrich ! for he was
A saint here of the loftiest class,
By martyrdom more dreadly solemn
Than that of Simeon on the column.
God put him to the torture ; seven
Long years beneath unpitying heaven,
The body dead, the man at strife
With all the common cares of life :
A living Voice intense and brave
Issuing from a Mattress-grave.
At length the cruel agony wrung
Confessions from that haughty tongue ;
Confessions of the strangest, more
Than ever God had bargained for ;
With prayers and penitential psalms
That gave the angels grinning qualms,
With jests when sharp pangs cut too deep
That made the very devils weep.

Enough of this! the Monarch cried ;
Fear gave what Mercy still denied ;
Torture committed suicide
To quench that voice ; the victim died
Victorious over Heaven and Doom ;
The Mattress-grave became a tomb
Deep in our Mother's kindly womb,
Oblivion tranced the painful breath,
The Death-in-Life grew perfect Death."

"Is it the mere quaint German type,
Or is it from some blackened pipe ?
The volume seems without a joke
A volume of tobacco-smoke !"

"The choice is difficult in sooth ;
But sing that song of love and ruth
The Princess Ilse sang his youth.
And sing it very softly sweet,
As not to ravish all the street ;
And sing it to what air you will,
Your voice in any tune must thrill. . . .
Yet stay, there was a certain hymn
Which used at Sunday School to brim
Our hearts with holy love and zeal,
Our eyes with tears they yearned to feel :

Mild Bishop Heber shall embrace
 Wild Heine by sweet music's grace,
 The while you sing the verses fair
 To *Greenland's icy mountains' air* ;
 A freezing name ! but icy mountains
 Were linked with Afric's sunny fountains."

*Ich bin die Prinsessin Ilse,
 Und wohne im Ilsenstein ;
 Komm mit nach meinem Schlosse,
 Wir wollen sel'ig sein.*

"Dear Princess, I will come with thee
 Into thy cavern's mystery,
 And both of us shall happy be."

*In meinen weissen Armen,
 An meiner weissen Brust,
 Da sollst du liegen und träumen
 Von alter Märchenlust.*

"In your white arms, on your white breast,
 I'll lie and dream in perfect rest,
 With more than faëry blessings blest."

*Es bleiben todt die Todten,
 Und nur der Lebendige lebt ;
 Und ich bin schön und blühend,
 Mein lachendes Herze beb't.*

“Yes, dead the dead for ever lie ;
But you my Love and your Love I
Are of the souls that cannot die.”

*Doch dich soll mein Arm umschlingen,
Wie er Kaiser Heinrich umschlang ;—
Ich hielt ihm zu die Ohren,
Wenn die Trompet erklang.*

“Roll drum, plead lute, blare trumpet-call ;
Our ears shall be fast closed to all,
Beneath divine Oblivion's pall.”

Oh what a quaintly coupled pair
The poem and the music were !
The Sunday School's old simple air,
The heathen verses rich and rare !

Wan ghosts have risen from the grave
To flit across the midnight wave ;
Pale phantoms started from the tomb
To hurry through the wildwood gloom ;
Cold corpses left their wormy bed
To mingle in high feasts, 'tis said ;
But never since old Noah's flood
Turned Eden into sand and mud,

(Relieving thus the Heavenly guard
 From its long spell of duty hard?) *
 Has any Angel left the sphere
 Of Heaven to dance with mortals here :
 Though earthly angels crowd each ball,
 Since women are such angels all.

My partner was no icy corse,
 No phantom of a wild remorse,
 No Lamia of delirious dream,
 No nymph of forest, sea, or stream :
 A soul of fire, a lovely form
 Lithe to the dance and breathing warm ;
 A face that flushed with cordial pleasure,
 Dove-feet that flew in perfect measure ;
 A little hand so soft and fine,
 Whose touch electric thrilled through mine ;

* The Holy Bible unfortunately tells us nothing of this. Readers may, however, refer to our auxiliary Bible, "Paradise Lost," Book xi., Michael's prophecy of the Flood. But Milton was really too careless about the fate of the guard. Was it recalled in time, or did it perish at its post? Did the deluge sweep over that gate, "With dreadful faces thronged, and fiery arms"? Let us hope not. It would be sad to think that the "flaming sword" was extinguished with a hiss; and that the "Cherubim" were drowned like the other animals, without even the salvation of a single live specimen in the Ark. Probably, however, being abundantly and superabundantly furnished with wings, they all flew away to Heaven when the waters began sweeping the Mount of Paradise "Down the great river to the opening gulf."

A heart that beat against my breast
Full pulses of triumphant zest ;
Deep eyes, pure eyes, as dark as night,
Yet full of liquid love and light
When their moon-soul came floating through
The clouds of mystery into view,
And myriad star-rays glittering keen
Were tempered in its mystic sheen ;
Soft lips full curved in ruddy glow,
And swift as young Apollo's bow,—
What arrowy laughters flashing free
With barbs of pleasant mockery
Pierced through and through the whirling rout,
And let thought in where life flew out,
And made the world a happy dream
“ Where nothing is, but all things seem ” !

The splendid beauty of her face,
Her dancing's proud and passionate grace,
Her soul's eternal life intense
Lavishly poured through every sense,
Intoxicated all the air,
Inspiring every dancer there :
Never again shall that old Hall
Spin round with such another Ball ;

The human whirlwind might have whirled
It through the heights of air and hurled
It down at last into the sea,
Nor yet disturbed the revelry.
The violin and the violoncello,
The flute that withered little fellow,
The red-faced cornet always mellow,
Our noble Orchestra of four,
Played as they never played of yore,
Played as they will play nevermore,
As if the rushing air were cloven
By all the legions of Beethoven.

In one of the eternal trances
(Five minutes long) between two dances,
The Brown whom one meets everywhere
Came smug and grinning to me there,
And "May I have the pleasure,—honour?"
A glance (encouraging) upon her.

"My dear good Brown, you understand
This lady's from a foreign land,
And does not comprehend a word
You speak so well: nay, I have heard
That one may search all England through,
And not find twenty scholars who

Can speak or write her language clearly,
Though once our great men loved it dearly.
The little of it I know still
(Read well, write badly, speak so ill !)
I first learnt many years ago
From her, and one you do not know,
A restless wanderer, one of these
You call damned doubtful refugees,
Enthusiasts, whom while harboured here
All proper folk dislike and fear."

Brown muttered, "I've a little knowledge
Of French,—the Working Man's New College."

"Ah, yes ; your French is doubtless good,
And French we know is understood
By polished people everywhere ;
But then her land though rich and fair
Lies far beyond the continents
Of civilised accomplishments ;
And she could sooner learn to speak
Persian or Sanskrit, Norse or Greek,
Than this delightful brilliant witty
Tongue of delightful Paris city,

* (' *The devils' paradise, the hell
Of angels*—Heine knew it well !).
And finally, my dearest Brown,
The customs of her folk would frown

* " Mich ruft der Tod . . .

Glaub mir, mein Kind, mein Weib, Mathilde,
Nicht so gefährlich ist das wilde
Erzürnte Meer und der trotzige Wald,
Als unser jetzige Aufenthalt !
Wie schrecklich auch der Wolf und der Geier,
Haifische und sonstige Meerungeheuer :
Viel grimmere, schlimmere Bestien enthält
Paris, die leuchtende Hauptstadt der Welt,
Das singende, springende, schöne Paris,
Die Hölle der Engel, der Teufel Paradies—
Das ich dich hier verlassen soll,
Das macht mir verrückt, das macht mir toll ! "

LETZTE GEDICHTE : *Babylonische Sorgen.*

The title suggests, and may have been specially suggested by, that great verse of Jeremiah li. 7 : " Babylon hath been a golden cup in the Lord's hand, that made all the earth drunken : the nations have drunken of her wine ; therefore the nations are mad."

So Béranger, in his *Jean de Paris* :

" Quel amour incroyable,
Maintenant et jadis,
Pour ces murs dont le diable
A fait son paradis ! "

And he who knew his Paris best, Balzac the Terrible : " Cette succursale de l'enfer."—*Melmoth Reconcilié.*

Again, " Paris a été nommé un enfer. Tenez ce mot pour vrai."—*La Fille aux Yeux d'or.* (*Histoire des Treize.*)

And yet again, " Ce Paris qualifié d'antichambre de l'enfer."—*Balzac, to the Abbé Eglé.*

Austere rebukes on her if she
Dared dance with any one but me !”

Brown went and whispered strange remarks
To eager girls and staring clerks. . . .
We are caught up and swept away
In the cyclone-gallop's sway,
And round and round and round and round
Go whirling in a storm of sound.

But in the next brief perfect trance
That followed the impassioned dance,
The Jones whom one too rarely sees
Came rushing on me like a breeze ;
“ What miracle ! what magic might !—
But have you seen yourself to-night ?”

“ Oh yes ! twin-mirrored in the skies
Of these my Lady's glorious eyes !
In our rude days of kingly fear,
If any monarch drawing near
The palace saw so bright and clear
His picture in the windows shine,
He well might say, *Auspicious sign*
That still this noble home is mine !”

“ But you are half as tall again,
And stately as a King of Men ;
And in the prime of health and youth,
Younger by twenty years, in sooth ;
Your face, the pale and sallow, glows
As fresh as any morning rose ;
Your voice rings richly as a bell,
Resonant as a trumpet-swell ;
Your dull and mournful dreamy eyes
Now dazzle, burn, and mesmerise :
Thus gazed, thus spoke, thus smiled, thus trod,
Apollo the immortal God ! ”

“ Dear Jones, as usual, you are right ;
I stand revealed Myself to-night,
The God of Poesy, Lord of Light. . . .
But you would learn now whence the change :
Listen ; it is and is not strange.

“ There was a Fountain long ago,
A fountain of perpetual flow,
Whose purest springlets had their birth
Deep in the bosom of the earth.
Its joyous wavering silvery shaft
To all the beams of morning laughed,

Its steadfast murmurous crystal column
Was loved by all the moonbeams solemn ;
From morn to eve it fell again
A singing many-jewelled rain,
From eve to morn it charmed the hours
With whispering dew and diamond showers ;
Crowned many a day with sunbows bright,
With moonbows halo'd many a night ;
And so kept full its marble urn,
All fringed with fronds of greenest fern,
O'er which with timeless love intent
A pure white marble Goddess leant :
And overflowing aye the urn
In rilletts that became a burn,
It danced adown the verdant slope
As light as youth, as gay as hope,
And 'wandered at its own sweet will ;'
And here it was a lakelet still,
And there it was a flashing stream ;
And all about it was a dream
Of beauty, such a Paradise
As rarely blooms beneath our skies ;
The loveliest flowers, the grandest trees,
The broadest glades, the fairest leas ;
And double music tranced the hours,—
The countless perfumes of the flowers,

The countless songs of swift delight
That birds were singing day and night.

“ But suddenly there fell a change ;
So suddenly, so sad, so strange !
The fountain ceased to wave its lance
Of silver to the spheral dance ;
The runnels were no longer fed,
And each one withered from its bed ;
The stream fell stagnant, and was soon
A bloated marsh, a pest-lagoon ;
The sweet flowers died, the noble trees
Turned black and gaunt anatomies ;
The birds all left the saddened air
To seek some other home as fair ;
The pure white Goddess and her urn
Were covered with the withered fern,—
The red and yellow fans outworn,
And red and yellow leaves forlorn,
Slow drifting round into a heap
Till the fair shapes were buried deep :
The happy Eden rich and fair
Became a savage waste, a lair
Where Silence with broad wings of gloom
Brooded above a nameless tomb. . . .

And thus it was for years and years ;
And only there were bitter tears
Beneath those dark wings shed alway
Instead of the bright fountain's play,
And in the stead of sweet bird-tones
Low unheard solitary moans.

“ Ah, sudden was that ruin sad ;
As sudden, resurrection glad !
Unheralded one quiet night
There came an Angel darkly bright,
An Angel from the Heavenly Throne,
Or else that Goddess carved in stone
Enraptured into life by power
Of her most marvellous beauty's dower :
And from her long robe's sweeping pride
The dead leaves all were scattered wide ;
And from a touch of her soft hand,
Without one gesture of command,
All suddenly was rolled away
A mighty stone, whose broad mass lay
Upon the urn, as on a tomb
There lies a stone to seal its gloom :
And straightway sprang into the night
That joyous Fountain's shaft of light,

Singing its old unwearied tune
Of rapture to the quiet moon,
As strong and swift and pure and high
As ere it ever seemed run dry :
For never since that Long-ago
Had its deep springlets ceased to flow ;
But shut down from the light of day
Their waters sadly oozed away
Through pores of the dim underearth,
Bereft of splendour, speed, and mirth ;
Yet ever ready now as then
To leap into the air again."

" Ah yes," said Jones, " I understand."
Then with his smile of sadness bland,
" *My* fountain never got a chance '
To spring into the sunlight's glance,
And wave its mystic silver lance
In time with all the starry dance ;
Yet I believe 'tis ever there
Heart-pulsing in its secret lair,
Until the Goddess some fine day
Shall come and roll the stone away. . . .
Nor have you startled me ; I knew
Quite well it was a Goddess too."

“ Because so well you know and speak
Her esoteric Persian-Greek.”

“ Or shall we say (a truth of wine,
If falsehood in the nectar-shine),
Because a beauty so divine
Has stirred no envy, grudge, or pine
In any girl's or woman's breast,
But only love and joyous zest?—
For if the beauty dazzling thus
Were nubile and not nebulous?”

“ This beauty is more real far
Than all the other beauties are ;
And such a beauty's bridal kiss
Transcends all other bridal bliss ;
And such a marriage-love will last
When all the other loves are past.
You know this well, dear friend of mine,
When drinking nectar and not wine.”

“ I know it,—know it not : we rhyme
The petals of the Flower of Time ;
And rhyming strip them off, perplex
For every leaflet by the next
Is contradicted in its turn ;

And thus we yearning ever yearn,
 And ever learning never learn ;
 For while we pluck, from hour to hour
 New petals spring to clothe the flower,
 And till we strip the final one
 Can final answer fall to none. . . .
 To strip and strip the living bloom,
 Nor learn the oracle of Doom
 Until the fulgent Flower o' the Day
 Is altogether stripped away ;
 Then with the dead stem leave the light,
 And moulder in eternal night !”

“The sad old truth of earthly wine ;
 The joyous fable in the shine
 Of nectar at the feast divine ! . . .
*Love a near maid, love a far maid,
 But let Hebe be your barmaid ;
 When she proffers you the cup,
 Never fear to drink it up ;
 Though you see her crush her wine
 From a belladonna vine,
 Drink it, pouring on the clods
 Prelibation to the gods.*
 Reck this rede unto the end :
 It is my good night, good friend.”

.

The music 'gan again arise ;
A music of delicious sighs,
A music plaintive with a grief
More exquisite than all relief ;
Music impassioned, but subdued
To a sweet sad dreamy mood. . .
And now a swift and sudden stream
Of melody breaks through the dream :
The still air trembles, and the whole
Night-darkness fills with life and soul,
And keen stars listen throbbing pale
The drama of the nightingale. . . .
The nightingale is now a thrush. . .
And now a soaring skylark. . . . Hush !
Never a song in all the world !
But low clouds floating soft and furled,
And rivers winding far away,
And ripples weaving faëry spray,
And mists far-curving swelling round
Dim twilight hills that soon are drowned,
And breezes stirring solemn woods,
And seas embracing solitudes ;
Interminable intervolving,
Weaving webs for redissolving ;
The intertwining, interblending
Of spirals evermore ascending ;

The floating hither, wheeling thither,
Without a whence, without a whither ;
And still we whirl and wheel and float,
But how the dancers are remote !

“ Is that the wonderful waltz-tune,
Or is it the full-shining moon ?
And are those notes, so far and far ?
Each seems to me a brilliant star !
Can we be dancing in the ball,
And yet not see the earth at all ? . . .
The starry notes are round us whirling,
Beneath the great moon-waltz is twirling ;
And thus without our own endeavour
May we float and float for ever ? ”

“ When six long days of toil are past,
The holy Sabbath comes at last.”

Oh better than a battle won,
And better than a great deed done,
And better than a martyr's crown,
And better than a king's renown,
And better than a long calm life
With lovely bairns and loving wife,
And better than the sweetest thought
That tearful Memory ever brought

From searching with her rapturous woe
Within the moonlit Long-ago,
And better than the stillest sleep
To him who wakes to moan and weep,
And better than the trance of death
To him who yearning suffereth ;
Better than this, than these, than all
That mortals joys and triumphs call,
Was last night's Meeting, last night's Ball !

.

The tongue of flame had ceased to play,
The steadfast glow long died away ;
The house was grave-still, and the street
Re-echoed to no wandering feet ;
And still and chill as any stone
* I lay upon the couch alone,
Drest to the white kid-gloves in all
The dress I put on for the Ball :
And there, that glorious flower you see,
She fixed it in my breast for me ;
Could such a flower of flowers have birth
Upon our worn-out frigid earth ?
That golden-hearted amethyst
Her own hand held, her own mouth kissed.

* (It may not be amiss to vouch
The previous note anent this couch.)

The clocks struck one and two and three,
And each stroke fell as aimed at me ;
For none should muse or read or write
So late into the awful night,
None dare awake the deep affright
That pulseth in the heart of night,
None venture save sleep-shrouded quite
Into the solemn dead of night,
None wander save in dreams of light
Through the vast desert of black night ;
And none at three be dressed at all,
Unless mere night-clothes dress you call
Or underlinen of a pall ;
Therefore, my friend, in bidding you
And all the rest a long adieu,
For I am weary, Alleleu !—
Yourself and all I re-advise,
Early to bed and early to rise,
Is the way to be healthy, wealthy, and wise !

EPILOGUE.

(Grossness here indeed is regnant,
But it is the grossness pregnant ;
HEINE growled it, ending thus
His wild *Book of Lazarus* ;

Modern swansong's final note,
Hoarse death-rattle in the throat.
Swan was white or black?—*Our* candour!
Black or white no swan's a gander.)

“Glory warms us in the grave!
Stupid words, that sound so brave!
Better warmth would give to us
Molly Seagrim amorous,
Slobbering kisses lips and tongue,
And yet reeking from the dung.*
Better warmth would likewise dart
Through the cockles of one's heart,
Drinking mulled wine, punch, or grog,
Until helpless as a log,
In the lowest den whose crowd is
Thieves and drabs and ragged rowdies,
Mortgaged to the gallows-rope,
But who meanwhile breathe and hope,
And more enviable far
Than the son of Thetis are.
Yes, Pelides was a judge;—
Better live the poorest drudge

* *Eine Kuh-magd*, any farm-wench; but Heine, who knew Fielding, probably had Molly Seagrim in his mind.

In the upper world, than loom
On the Stygian shore of gloom
Phantom-Leader, bodiless roamer,
Though besung by mighty Homer.”

NOTE.—I found this Story, and that of the short piece following, which merit far better English versions than I have been able to accomplish, in the *De l'Amour* of De Stendhal (Henri Beyle, chap. 53), where they are given among “Fragments Extracted and Translated from an Arabic Collection, entitled *The Divan of Love*, compiled by Ebn-Abi-Hadglat.” From another of these fragments I quote a few lines by way of introduction: “The Benou-Azra are a tribe famous for love among all the tribes of Arabia. So that the manner in which they love has passed into a proverb, and God has not made any other creatures so tender in loving as are they. Sahid, son of Agba, one day asked an Arab, Of what people art thou? I am of the people who die when they love, answered the Arab. Thou art then of the tribe of Azra? said Sahid. Yes, by the master of the Caaba! replied the Arab. Whence comes it, then, that you thus love? asked Sahid. Our women are beautiful and our young men are chaste, answered the Arab.”

On this theme HEINE has a poem of four unrhymed quatrains, *Der Azra*, of which the sense without the melody may be given in English:—

Daily went the wondrous-lovely
Sultan's daughter to and fro there
In the evening by the fountain,
Where the waters white were plashing.

Daily stood the youthful captive
In the evening by the fountain,
Where the waters white were plashing;
Daily grew he pale and paler.

And one evening the princess
Stepped to him with sudden question:
“I would know your name, young captive,
And your country and your kindred.”

Then the slave replied: “My name is
Mohammed, I come from Yemen,
And my kindred are the Azra,
They who perish when they love.”

WEDDAH AND OM-EL-
BONAIN.

PART I.



I.

WEDDAH and Om-el-Bonain, scarcely grown
To boy and girlhood from their swaddling bands,
Were known where'er the Azra tribe was known,
Through Araby and all the neighbouring lands ;
Were chanted in the songs of sweetest tone
Which sprang like fountains 'mid the desert sands :
They were so beautiful that none who saw
But felt a rapture trembling into awe.

II.

+

Once on a dewy eve when the balm
Of herb and flower made all the air rich wine,
And still the sunless shadow of the palm

Sought out the birthplace of the day divine,
These two were playing in the happy calm.
A young chief said : In these be sure a sign
Great God vouchsafes ; a living talisman
Of glory and rich weal to bless our clan.

III.

Proud hearts applauded ; but a senior chief
Said : Perfect beauty is its own sole end ;
It is ripe flower and fruit, not bud and leaf ;
The promise and the blessing meet and blend,
Fulfilled at once : then malice, wrath, and grief,
Lust of the foe and passion of the friend,
Assail the marvel ; for all Hell is moved
Against the work of Allah most approved.

IV.

Thus beauty is that pearl a poor man found ;
Which could not be surrendered, changed, or sold,
Which he might never bury in the ground,
Or hide away within his girdle-fold ;
But had to wear upon his brow uncrowned,
A star of storm and terrors ; for, behold,
The richest kings raged jealous for its light,
And just men's hearts turned robbers at the sight.

V.

But if the soul be royal as the gem,
That star of danger may flash victory too,
The younger urged, and bring the diadem
To set itself in. And the other : True ;
If all Life's golden apples crown one stem,
Fate touches none ; but single they are few :
And whether to defeat or triumph, this
One star lights war and woe, not peaceful bliss.

VI.

But nothing recked the children in that hour,
And little recked through fifteen happy years,
Of any doom in their surpassing dower :
Rich with the present, free from hopes and fears,
They dwelt in time as in a heavenly bower :
Their life was strange to laughter as to tears,
Serenely glad ; their partings were too brief
For pain ; and side by side, what thing was grief ?

VII.

Amidst their clan they dwelt in solitude,
Not haughtily but by instinctive love ;

As lion mates with lion in the wood,
And eagle pairs with eagle not with dove ;
The lowlier creatures finding their own good
In their own race, nor seeking it above :
 These dreamt as little of divided life
 As that first pair created man and wife.

VIII.

The calm years flowed thus till the youth and maid
Were almost man and woman, and the spell
Of passion wrought, and each was self-dismayed ;
The hearts their simple childhood knew so well
Were now such riddles to them, in the shade
And trouble of the mists that seethe and swell
 When the large dawn is kindling, which shall grow
 Through crimson fires to steadfast azure glow.

IX.

That year a tribe-feud, which some years had slept
Through faintness, woke up stronger than before ;
And with its stir young hearts on all sides leapt
For battle, swoln with peace and plenteous store ;
Swift couriers to and fro the loud land swept
Weaving thin spites to one vast woof of war :
 And Weddah sallied forth elate, ranked man,
 A warrior of the warriors of his clan.

X.

Ere long flushed foes turned haggard at his name ;
The beautiful, the terrible : for fire
Burns most intensely in the clearest flame ;
The comeliest steed is ever last to tire
And swiftest footed ; and in war's fierce game
The noblest sword is deadliest in its gyre :
 His gentle gravity grew keen and gay
 In hottest fight as for a festal day.

XI.

And while he fought far distant with his band,
Walid the Syrian, Abd-el-Malek's son ;
Renowned already for a scheme long planned
With silent patience, and a sharp deed done
When its ripe fruit leaned ready for his hand,
And liberal sharing of the fruit well won ;
 Came south to greet the tribe, and knit anew
 Old bonds of friendship and alliance true.

XII.

He had full often from the poets heard
Of these two children the divinely fair ;
But was not one to kindle at a word,
And languish on faint echoes of an air ;

By what he saw and touched his heart was stirred,
Nor knew sick longings and the vague despair
Of those who turn from every nearest boon
To catch like infants at the reachless moon.

XIII.

But when one sunset flaming crimson-barred
He saw a damsel like a shape of sleep,
Who moved as moves in indolence the pard ;
Above whose veil burned large eyes black and deep,
The lairs of an intense and slow regard
Which made all splendours of the broad world cheap,
And death and life thin dreams ; fate-smitten there
He rested shuddering past the hour of prayer.

XIV.

Be heaven all stars, we feel the one moon's rise :
Who else could move with that imperial grace ?
Who else could bear about those fateful eyes,
Too overwhelming for a mortal face ?
Beyond all heed of questions and surprise
He stood a termless hour in that same place,
Convulsed in silent wrestling with his doom ;
Haggard as one brought living from the tomb.

XV.

And she had shuddered also passing by,
A moment ; for her spirit though intent
Was chilled as conscious of an evil eye ;
But forthwith turned and o'er its one dream bent ;
A woman liting as she came anigh :
But to destroy on earth was Weddah sent ;
 There where he is brave warriors fall before him,
 Where he is not pine damsels who adore him.

XVI.

And thus with purpose like a trenchant blade
Forged in that fierce hour's fire, the Syrian chief
Began new life. When next the Council weighed
The heavy future charged with wrath and grief,
He spoke his will : I asked to wed the maid,
The child of Abd-el-Aziz : and, in brief,
 I bring for dowry all our wealth and might,
 Unto our last heart's blood, to fight your fight.

XVII.

All mute with marvelling sat : Her sire then said :
From infancy unto my brother's son
She has been held betrothed : our Lord can wed
Full many a lovelier, many a richer one.

But quite in vain they reasoned, flattered, pled ;
This was his proffer, other he had none :
A boy and girl outweighed the Azra tribe ?
'Twas strange ! His vow was fixed to that sole bribe.

XVIII.

And as their couriers came in day by day
Pregnant with portents of yet blacker ill ;
And all their urgency broke in fuming spray
Against the rock of his firm-planted will ;
The baffled current took a tortuous way,
And drowned a happy garden green and still,
O'erwhelming Abd-el-Aziz with that gibe,
A boy and girl outvalue all our tribe ?

XIX.

He loved his daughter, and he loved yet more
His brother's son ; and now the whole tribe prest
The scale against them : there was raging war,
Too sure of hapless issue, in his breast ;
Sea-tossed where rocks on all sides fanged the shore.
She heard him moaning : Would I were at rest,
Ere this should come upon me, in the grave !
Her poor heart bled to hear him weep and rave.

XX.

She flung herself all yearning at his feet ;
The long white malehair dashed her brow with tears ;
But her tears scalded him ; her kisses sweet
Were crueller than iron barbs of spears ;
He had no eyes her tender eyes to meet ;
Her soft caressing words scarce touched his ears
 But they were fire and madness in his brain :
 Yet while she clasped he mutely clasped again.

XXI.

At length he answered her : A heavy doom
Is laid upon me ; now, when I am old,
And weak, and bending toward the quiet tomb . . .
Can it then be, as we are sometimes told,
That women, nay, that young girls in their bloom,
Lovely, beloved, and loving, have been bold
 To give their lives, when blenched the bravest man,
 For safety of their city or their clan ?

XXII.

She trembled in cold shadow of a rock
Leaning to crush her where she knelt fast bound ;
She grew all ear to catch the coming shock,
And felt already quakings of the ground ;

Yet firmly said : Your anguish would not mock
Your daughter, O my Father : pray expound
The woeful riddle ; and whate'er my part,
It is your very blood which feeds this heart.

XXIII.

He told her all : the perils great and near ;
The might of Walid ; and the friendship long
Which bound them to his house, and year by year
With mutual kindnesses had grown more strong ;
His offer, his demand, which would not hear
A word in mitigation right or wrong.

Her young blood curdled : Bring him to our tent,
That I may plead ; perchance he will relent.

XXIV.

He came ; and found her sitting double-veiled,
For grief was round her like a funeral stole.
She pleaded, she o'erwhelmed him, and she failed ;
For still the more her passion moved his soul,
The more he loved her ; when his heart most quailed,
His purpose stretched most eager for the goal :
I stake myself, house, friends, all, for the tribe
Which gives me you ; but for no meaner bribe.

XXV.

So her face set into a stony mask,
And heavy silence crushed them for an hour
Ere she could learn the words to say her task :
Let only mutes appeal to Fate's deaf power !
Behold I pledge myself to what you ask,
My sire here sells me for the settled dower :
 The sheikhs can know we are at one ; I pray
 That none else know it ere the wedding-day.

XXVI.

Which shall be when next moon is on the wane
As this to-night : my heart is now the bier
Of that which we have sacrificed and slain ;
My own poor Past, still beautiful and dear,
Cut off from life, wants burial ; and though vain
Is woman's weeping, I must weep I fear
 A little on the well-beloved's tomb
 Ere marriage smiles and blushes can outbloom.

XXVII.

He left them, sire and daughter, to their woe ;
Himself then sick at heart as they could be :
But set to work at once, and spurred the slow
Sad hours till they were fiery-swift as he :

With messengers on all sides to and fro,
With ravelled webs of subtle policy,
He gave the sheikhs good earnest of what aid
They had so cheaply bought with one fair maid.

XXVIII.

Thus he took Araby's one peerless prize,
And homeward went ungrudging all the cost ;
Though she was marble ; with blank arid eyes,
Wearied and hopeless as the waste they crossed
When neither moon nor star is in the skies,
And water faileth, and the track is lost.
He took such statue triumphing for wife,
Assured his love would kindle it to life.

XXIX.

She had indeed wept, wept and wailed that moon,
But had not buried yet her shrouded Past ;
Which ever lay in a most deathlike swoon,
Pallid and pulseless, motionless and ghast,
While Fate withheld from it death's perfect boon :
She kept this doleful mystery locked up fast ;
Her form was as its sepulchre of stone,
Her heart its purple couch and hidden throne.

XXX.

She went ; and sweeter voiced than cooing dove
Hassan the bard his farewell ode must render :
We had a Night, the dream of heaven above,
Wherein one moon and countless stars of splendour ;
We had a Moon, the face of perfect love,
Wherein two nights with stars more pure and tender :
Our Night with its one moon we still have here ;
Where is our Moon with its twin nights more dear ?



PART II.



I.

As Weddah and his troop were coming back
From their first foray, which success made brief,
Scouts met him and in sharp haste turned his track
On special mission to a powerful chief,
Who wavered still between the white and black,
And lurked for mere self-profit like a thief.

 This errand well fulfilled, at last he came
 To flush her tear-pearls with the ruby fame.

II.

Into the camp full joyously he rode,
Leading his weary escort ; as for him,
The love and trust that in his bosom glowed
Had laughed away all weariness of limb.
The sheikhs, his full report heard, all bestowed
Well-measured praises, brief and somewhat grim ;
 As veterans scanning the enormous night
 In which this one star shone so bravely bright.

III.

Then Abd-el-Aziz rose and left the tent,
And he accompanied with eager pace ;
And marked not how his frank smiles as he went
Were unreflected in each well-known face ;
How joyous greetings he on all sides sent
Brought hollow echoes as from caverned space :
 His heart drank sweet wine 'mid the roses singing,
 And thought the whole world with like revels ringing.

IV.

He entered with his uncle, and his glance
Sank disappointed. But the old man wept
With passion o'er him, eyeing him askance ;
And made him eat and drink ; and ever kept
Questioning, questioning, as to every chance
Throughout his absence ; keen to intercept
 The fatal, But my cousin ? ready strung
 Upon the tense lips by the eager tongue.

V.

At length it flew, the lover's wingèd dart ;
He sped it wreathed with flowers of hope and joy,
It pierced with iron point the old man's heart,
Who quivering cried : You are, then, still a boy !

Love, love, the sweet to meet, the smart to part,
Make all your world of pleasure and annoy !
Is this a time for dalliance in rose bowers ?
The vultures gather ; do they scent sweet flowers ?

VI.

It is a time of woe and shame, of strife
Whose victory must be dolorous as defeat :
The sons of Ishmael clutch the stranger's knife
To stab each other ; every corpse you meet
Has held a Moslem soul, an Arab life :
The town-serfs prisoned in stark fort and street
Exult while countless tents that freely roam
Perish like proud ships clashing in the foam. .

VII.

We might learn wisdom from our foes and thralls !
The mongrels of a hundred barbarous races,
Who know not their own sires, appease their brawls,
Leave night and sunward set their impure faces,
To bay in concert round old Syrian walls,
And thrust their three gods on our holy places :
We have one Sire, one Prophet, and one Lord,
And yet against each other turn the sword.

VIII.

Thus long he groaned with fevered bitterness,
Till, Say at least my Father she is well !
Stung prudence out of patience : Surely yes !
The children of the faith whom Azrael
Hath gathered, do they suffer our distress ?—
But smitten by that word the lover fell,
As if at such rash mention of his name
That bird of God with wings of midnight came.

IX.

Deep in the shadow of those awful plumes
A night and day and night he senseless lay ;
And Abd-el-Aziz cowered 'mid deeper glooms,
Silent in vast despair, both night and day :
It seemed two forms belonging to the tombs
Had been abandoned in that tent ; for they
Were stark and still and mute alike, although
The one was conscious of their double woe.

X.

At last death left the balance, and the scale
Of wretched life jarred earth : and in the morn
The lover woke, confused as if a veil
Of heavy dreams involved him ; weak and worn

And cold at heart, and wondering what bale
Had wounded him and left him thus forlorn :
 So still half-stunned with anguish he lay long,
 Fretful to rend the shroud that wrapt his wrong.

XI.

He turned ; and on the pillow, near his head,
He saw a toy, a trifle, that gave tongue
To mute disaster : forthwith on his bed
The coiled-snake Memory hissed and sprang and stung :
Then all the fury of the storm was shed
From the black swollen clouds that overhung ;
 The hot rain poured, the fierce gusts shook his soul,
 Wild flashes lit waste gloom from pole to pole.

XII.

He hardly dared to touch the petty thing,
The talisman of this tremendous spell :
A purse of dark blue silk ; a golden ring,
A letter in the hand he knew so well.
Still as he sought to read new gusts would fling
Wet blindness in his vision, and a knell
 Of rushing thunder trample through his brain
 And tread him down into the swoon again.

XIII.

He read : Farewell ! In one sad word I weave
More thoughts than pen could write or tongue declare.
No other word can Om-el-Bonain leave
To Weddah, save her blessing ; and her prayer.
That he will quail not, though his heart must grieve,
That all his strength and valour, skill and care,
Shall be devoted loyally to serve
The sacred Tribe, and never self-ward swerve.

XIV.

For verily the Tribe is all, and we
Are nothing singly save as parts of it :
The one great Nile flows ever to the sea,
The waterdrops for ever change and flit ;
And some the first ooze snares, and some may be
The King's sweet draught, proud Cario's mirror ; fit
For all each service of the stream whose fame
They share, by which alone they have a name.

XV.

And since I know that you cannot forget,
And am too sure your love will never change,
I leave my image to your soul : but yet
Keep it as shrined and shrouded till the strange

Sad dream of life, illusion and regret,
Is ended ; short must be its longest range.
Farewell. Hope gleams the wan lamp in a tomb
Above a corpse that waits the final doom.

XVI.

This writing was a dear but cruel friend
That dragged him from the deep, and held him fast
Upon life's shore, who would have found an end,
Peace and oblivion. Turn from such a past
To such a future, and unquailing wend
Its infinite hopeless hours ! he shrank aghast :
Yet in this utmost weakness swore to make
The dreadful sacrifice for her dear sake.

XVII.

But when he stood as one about to fall,
And would go weep upon her tomb alone,
And Abd-el-Aziz had to tell him all,
The cry of anguish took a harsher tone :
Rich harem coverlets for funeral pall,
For grave a Syrian marriage couch and throne !
A human rival, breathing mortal breath,
And not the star-cold sanctity of Death !

XVIII.

This truth was as a potent poison-draught,
Fire in the entrails, wild fire in the brain,
Which kindled savage strength in him who quaffed
And did not die of its first maddening pain.
It struck him like the mere malignant shaft
Which stings a warrior into sense again,
 Who lay benumbed with wounds, and would have died
 Unroused : the fresh wound makes him crawl and hide.

XIX.

A month he wandered in wild solitude ;
And in that month grew old, and yet grew strong :
Now lying prone and still as death would brood
The whole long day through and the whole night long ;
Now demon-driven day and night pursued
Stark weariness amidst the clamorous throng
 Of thoughts that raged with memory and desire,
 And parched, his bruised feet burning, could not tire.

XX.

When he came back, o'ermastered by his vow
To serve the Tribe through which he was unblest,
None gazed without remorse upon his brow,
None felt his glance without an aching breast :

Magnificent in beauty even now,
Ravaged by grief and fury and unrest,
He moved among them swift and stern of deed,
And always silent save in action's need.

XXI.

And thus went forth, and unrejoicingly
Drank deep of war's hot wine : as one who drinks
And only grows more sullen, while yet he
Never the challenge of the full cup shrinks ;
And rises pale with horror when the glee
Of careless revellers into slumber sinks,
Because the feast which could not give him joy
At least kept phantoms from their worst annoy.

XXII.

The Lion of the Azra is come back
A meagre wolf ! foes mocked, who mocked no more
When midnight scared them with his fresh attack
After the long day's fighting, and the war,
Found him for ever wolf-like, on their track
As if consumed with slakeless thirst of gore :
Since he was cursed from slumber and repose,
He wreaked his restlessness on friends and foes.

XXIII.

The lightnings of his keen sword ever flashed
Without a ray of lightning in his glance ;
His blade where blades were thickest clove or clashed
Without a war-cry : ever in advance
He sought out death ; but death as if abashed
Adopted for its own his sword and lance,
 And rode his steed, and swayed aside or blunted
 The eager hostile weapons he affronted.

XXIV.

Once in the thick of battle as he raged
Thus cold and dumb amidst the furious cries,
Hassan the bard was near to him engaged,
And read a weird in those forlorn fixed eyes ;
And singing of that combat they had waged
Gave voice to what surpassed his own surmise :

*For our young Lion of the mateless doom
Shall never go a cold corpse to the tomb !*

XXV.

Awe silenced him who sang, and deep awe fell
On those who heard it round the campfire's blaze :
But when they questioned he had naught to tell ;
The vision had departed from his gaze.

The verse took wing and was a mighty spell ;
Upon the foe new terror and amaze,
 To friends redoubled force ; to one alone,
 The hero's self, it long remained unknown.

XXVI.

While Weddah in the South with fiery will
Bore conquest wheresoe'er his banner flew,
Walid with royal heart and patient skill
Upon the Syrian confines triumphed too.
They never met : each felt a savage thrill
Which jarred his inmost being through and through
 As still fresh fame the other's fame enlarged :
 Each wished his rival in the ranks he charged.

XXVII.

And when the foemen sued at length for peace
To victors surfeited with war's alarms,
Save him who knew all rest in rest must cease,
They said : O warriors, not by your own arms,
Though they are mighty ; may their might increase !
But more by Om-el-Bonain's fatal charms,
 Possessing both who lost her and who won,
 Have we been baffled, vanquished, and undone.

XXVIII.

Whence Hassan sang his sudden daring ode
Of Beauty revelling in the storm of fight :
For if the warriors into battle rode,
Their hearts were kindled by her living light ;
Either as sun that in pure azure glowed,
Or baleful star in deep despair's black night :
 And whether by despair or joy she lit
 Intenser fires perplexed the poet's wit.

XXIX.

And would you know why empires break asunder,
Why peoples perish and proud cities fall ;
Seek not the captains where the steedclouds thunder,
Seek not the elders in the council hall ;
But seek the chamber where some shining wonder
Of delicate beauty nestles, far from all
 The turmoil, toying with adornments queenly,
 And murmuring songs of tender love serenely.

XXX.

The clashing cymbals and the trumpets' clangour
Are peacefuller than her soft trembling lute ;
The armies raging with hot fire of anger
Are gentler than her gentle glances mute ;

The restless rushings of her dainty languor
Outveer the wind, outspeed the barb's pursuit :
Well Hassan knows ; who sings high laud and blessing
To this dear fatal riddle past all guessing.



PART III.



I.

THE war was over for the time ; and men
Returned to heal its wounds, repair its waste,
And thus grow strong and rich to fight again.
And Weddah, cold in victory's sun, embraced
The uncle whom his glory warmed ; and then,
Gathering his spoil of gems and gold in haste,
Rode forth : the clansmen wondered much to find
His famous favourite steed was left behind.

II.

He set out in the night : none knew his goal,
Though some might fix it in their secret thought.
He could no longer stifle or control,
In calm by battle's fever undistraught,
The piteous yearning of his famished soul
Which unappeasably its food besought ;
Fretting his life out like an infant's cry,
Let us but see her once before we die !

III.

When he returned not, soon the rumour spread,
That he had vanished now his work was done ;
The prophecy had been fulfilled ; not dead,
But in the body borne beyond the sun,
He lived eternal life. He heard this said
Himself in Walid's city, where as one
Who sojourns but for traffic's sake he dwelt ;
And hearing it, more surely shrouded felt.

IV.

Courteous and humble as beseemeth trade,
While ever on the watch, some gems he sold :
Men said, This young man is discreet and staid,
Yet fair in dealing, nor too fond of gold.
He smiled to hear his virtues thus arrayed,
A smile that gloomed to frowning ; but controlled
The haughty spirit surging in his breast ;
The end in view, what mattered all the rest ?

V.

The end in reach : for now the favourite slave
Of Om-el-Bonain, as he knew full well ;
A frank-eyed girl, whose bosom was a wave
Whereon love's lotus lightly rose and fell ;

Drew near to him, attracted by his grave
Unscptred majesty, and by the spell
Of his intense and fathomless regard,
Splendid in gloom as midnight myriad-starred.

VI.

She haggled for a trinket with her tongue
To veil the eager commerce of her eyes ;
Those daring smugglers when the heart is young,
For contraband of passion. His disguise
In talk with her but loosely round him hung ;
She glimpsed a secret and an enterprise ;
Love's flower, unsunned by hope, soon fades ; she
grieves,
Yet still returns to scent the rich dead leaves.

VII.

Till sick at heart and desperate with delay
He ventured all, abruptly flinging down
The weary mask : if death must end the play,
Better at once : I learn that in your town
Dwells Om-el-Bonain, whom you know men say,
Upon her eyeflash dropped a decent frown :
She is my mistress, and great Walid's wife—
The word his heart sought, stabbed in with a knife.

VIII.

Your mistress is my cousin ; and will be
The friend of who shall tell her I am here.
But if I may not trust your secrecy,
Tell Walid, tell not her : and have no fear
That I will harm you for harm done to me,
Unaimed at her. The life I hold not dear
Might dower you well. But with a passionate oath
The eager girl swore loyalty to both.

IX.

Then hurried from him to her lady sweet,
And thrilled her frozen heart with burning pang :
For life resigned and torpid in defeat
To new contention with its fate upsprang,
This sword of hope found lying at her feet
While love's impetuous clarion summons rang :
Weddah alive ! alive and here ! Beware !
If you now mock, Hell mock your dying prayer !

X.

I saw a merchant : never chief or king
Of form so noble, visited our land ;
He wore a little ring, a lady's ring,
On the last finger of a feared right hand ;

Some woe enormous overshadowing
Made beauty terrible that had been bland ;
He was convulsed when he would speak your name,
From such abysses of his heart it came.

XI.

Now whether this be Weddah's self or not,
My Lady in her wisdom must decide.
The lady's questions ploughed the self-same spot
Over and over lest some grains should hide
Of this vast treasure fallen to her lot :
Swear by the Prophet's tomb I may confide
In you as in myself until the end ;
And Om-el-Bonain lives and dies your friend.

XII.

Brave Amine swore, and bravely held the vow.
Her mistress kept her babbling all that eve,
A pleasant rill. And on the morrow : Now
Go bid him tell all friends that he must leave
In seven days ; so much we must allow,
So many starving hours of bliss bereave !
His travels urge him in his own despite ;
He gives a farewell feast on such a night :

XIII.

And in the meanwhile he shall fully learn
What is to follow. When this message came,
The thick dark in him 'gan to seethe and burn
Till soul and body fused in one clear flame.
His guests all blinked with wonder to discern
This glowing heart of joy ; and flushed with shame
Unmerited for having thought him cold,
Who made their old feel young, their young feel old.

XIV.

The long week passed ; the morning came to crown
Or kill the lovers' hope. It was a day
Well chosen, for some guests of high renown
Left Walid, who would speed them on their way ;
And festal tumult filled the sunny town.
The merchant in departure strolled astray
Amongst the groups about the palace heaving
To glimpse the rich procession form for leaving.

XV.

And when it left, absorbing every eye ;
A stream of splendours rolling with the din
Of horn and tabor under that blue sky ;
Came Amine carelessly and led him in,

With chat of certain anklets she would buy ;
And led him lounging onwards till they win
A storeroom where her mistress daily spent
Some matin hours on household cares intent.

XVI.

Large chests were ranged around it, one of which
They had made ready with most loving care ;
Lurked apertures among the carvings rich,
Above its deep soft couch, for light and air :
Behold your prison cell, your palace niche,
The jewel casket of my Lady fair !
I lock you in ; from her must come your key :
Love's captives pay sweet ransom to get free !

XVII.

She found her mistress fever-flushed, and told
Their full success : Our prisoner is secure ;
A lion meek as lambkin of the fold,
Prepared your harshest torments to endure !
But, dearest Lady, as you have been bold,
Be prudent, prudent, prudent, and assure
Long life to bliss. Now with your leave I go
To be well seen of all the house below.

XVIII.

She took another stairway for descent,
And sauntered round to the front courtyard gate ;
Chatting and laughing lightly as she went
With various groups, all busy in debate
On those departed guests : and some were shent
For meanness maugre retinue and state,
 And some extolled for bounteous disposition,
 And all summed up with judgment-day precision.

XIX.

Of all her fellow-slaves it seemed but one,
Whose breast was tinder for love's flame would she
Vouchsafe a spark, had spied the venture run :
Soho, my flirting madam, where is he
You brought in here an hour since with your fun ?
A happy rogue, whoever he may be !
 Have you already tired of this new dandy,
 Or hid him somewhere to be always handy ?

XX.

The stupid jealous creature that you are !
Where were your eyes, then, not to know his face ?
For weeks back he has dealt in our bazaar,
And now is on the road to some new place.

He had an emerald and diamond star
I thought might win my poor dear Lady's grace ;
She would not even look at it, alack !
I packed him off for ever with his pack.

XXI.

'Thus these long-hapless lovers for awhile,
Enringed with dreadful fire, safe ambush found,
Screened by its very glare ; a magic isle
By roaring billows guarded well till drowned ;
A refuge spot of green and liquid smile
Whose rampart was the simoom gathering round :
If darkness hid them, it was thunder gloom
Whose light must come in lightnings to consume.

XXII.

And even as Iskander's self, for whom
The whole broad earth sufficed not, found at last
Full scope vouchsafed him in the narrow tomb ;
So he long pining in the desert vast
As in a dungeon, found now ample room,
Found perfect freedom and content, shut fast
Alive within that coffer-coffin lonely,
Which gave him issue to that chamber only.

XXIII.

They knew what peril compassed them about,
But could not feel the dread it would inspire ;
Imperious love shut other passions out,
Or made them fuel for his altar fire.
At first one sole thought harassed them with doubt ;
To kill her lord and flee? Then tribe and sire
Would justly curse them ; for in every act
He had been loyal to the evil pact.

XXIV.

He had indeed wronged them ; for well he knew
Their love from infancy, their plighted troth,
When merciless in mastery he drew
From her repugnant lips the fatal oath :
That love avenged the wrong of love was due ;
But still his blood was sacred to them both ;
The tender husband and the proved ally
They dare not harm ; must death come, they could
die.

XXV.

Die ! Often he would dream for hours supine
Upon his lidded couch, Life's dream is over ;
I wait the resurrection in this shrine :
Anon an angel cometh to uncover

The inmost glories of the realm divine,
Because though dead I still am faithful lover ;
My spirit drinks its fill of bliss, and then
Sinks back into this twilight trance again.

XXVI.

Like bird above its young one in the nest
Which cannot fly, he often heard her singing ;
The thrill and swell of rapture from her breast
In fountains of delightful music springing :
It seemed he had been borne among the blest,
Whose quires around his darksome couch were ringing ;
Long after that celestial voice sank mute
His heartstrings kept sweet tremble like a lute.

XXVII.

She heard his breathing like a muffled chime,
She heard his tranquil heart-beats through the flow
Of busy menials in the morning time ;
Far-couched at night she felt a sudden glow,
And straight her breathing answered rhyme for rhyme
His softest furtive footsteps to and fro :
And none else heard? She marvelled how the
sense
Of living souls could be so dull and dense.

XXVIII.

Once early, early, ere the dawn grew loud,
She stole to watch his slumber by its gleam ;
And blushing with a soft laugh-gurgle bowed
And sank as in the bosom of a stream,
An ardent angel in a rosy cloud
Resolving the enchantment of his dream :
Where there is room for thee, is room for us ;
So may I share thy death-sarcophagus !

XXIX.

She grew so lovely, ravishing, and sweet,
Her brow so radiant and her lips so warm ;
Such rich heart-music stirred her buoyant feet,
And swayed the gestures of her lithe young form,
And revelled in her voice to bliss complete ;
That Walid whirled with his great passion's storm,
Befooled with joy, went doting down his hell :
Oh, tame and meek, my skittish wild gazelle !

XXX.

Thus these, sings Hassan, of their love's full measure
Drank swiftly in that circle of swift fire ;
A veil of light and ardour to their pleasure
Till it revealed their ashes on one pyre :

Some never win, some spend in youth this treasure,
And crawl down sad age starvelings of desire :
 These lavished royal wealth in one brief season,
 But Death found both so rich he gave them reason.



PART IV.



I.

THE tender almond-blossom flushed and white
Sank floating in warm flakes through lucid air ;
The rose flung forth into the sea of light
Her heart of fire and incense burning bare ;
The nightingale thrilled all the breathless night
With passion so intense it seemed despair :
 And still these lovers drank love's perfect wine
 From that gold urn of secrecy divine.

II.

Then Fate prepared the end. A grey old man,
Bowed down with grief who had not bent with time,
Made way to Walid in the full divan :
His son, great-hearted and in youth's hot prime,
Was now a fugitive and under ban
For an indignant deed of sinless crime ;
 A noble heirloom pearl the suppliant brought
 To clear the clouded face ere he besought.

III.

This pearl in Walid's mood of golden joy
Shone fair as morning star in rosy dawn ;
He called his minion, Motar : Take this toy
Unto your Lady where she sits withdrawn,
With my love-greeting, and this message, boy :
Were this a string of such, a monarch's pawn,
 A pearl for every note, it would not pay
 That song I heard you singing yesterday.

IV.

They had been leaning for an hour perchance,
Motionless, gazing in each other's eyes ;
Floating in deep pure joy, whose still expanse
Rippled but rarely with long satiate sighs ;
Their souls so intermingled in the trance,
So far away dissolved through fervent skies,
 That it was marvel how each fair mute form
 Without its pulse and breath remained life-warm.

V.

When rapid footsteps almost at the door
Stung her to vigilance, and her fierce start
Shook Weddah, and that lion of proud war
Must flee to covert like a timid hart :

But drunken with the message he now bore
The saucy youth flew in, Fate's servile dart,
Without announcement ; and espied, what he,
Still subtle though amazed, feigned not to see.

VI.

The message with the goodly pearl he gave :
She could for wrath have ground it into dust
Between her richer teeth, and stabbed the slave
Who brought it ; but most bitterly she must
Put on sweet smiles of pleasure, and the knave
With tender answer full of thanks entrust.

He lingered : Our kind lady will bestow
Some little mark of bounty ere I go ?

VII.

Her anger cried : Only the message dear
Has saved the messenger from punishment ;
If evermore as now you enter here
You shall be scourged and starved and prison-pent.
He covered away from her in sullen fear,
And darted from the room ; and as he went
The sting of her rebuke was curdling all
His blood of vanity to poison gall.

VIII.

He hissed in Walid's ear the seething spite :
My Lord's pearl by my Lady's was surpassed ;
In that rich cedar coffer to the right
I saw the treasure being hidden fast ;
A gallant, young and beautiful and bright.
Unmothered slave, be that foul lie your last !
 And clove the scandal with his instant sword
 Strong Walid : Motar had his full reward.

IX.

When Weddah, plunged from glory into gloom,
Heard that last speech of Om-el-Bonain there,
A sudden ominous sense of icy doom
Assailed his glowing heart with bleak despair.
The moment that false slave had left the room
She sprang to seize her lover in his lair :
 She bowed all quivering like a storm-swept palm ;
 He rose to meet her solemn, pale and calm.

X.

He clasped her with strong passion to his breast,
He kissed her with a very tender kiss :
Soul of my soul ! what lives men call most blest
Can be compared to our brief lives in bliss ?

But one wild year of anguish and unrest ;
Three moons of perfect secret love ! Were this
My dying hour, I thankfully attest
Of all earth's dooms I have enjoyed the best.

XI.

What, weeping, thou, such kiss-unworthy tears !
The glory of the Azra must not weep,
Whom mighty Weddah worships, for cold fears ;
But only for strong love, in stillness deep,
Secluded from all alien eyes and ears.
And now to vigil, and perchance to sleep,
Enshrined once more : be proud and calm and
strong ;
Your second visitor will come ere long.

XII.

And scarcely was all said when Walid came,
Full gently stealing for a tiger-spring ;
His love and fury, hope and fear and shame,
All mad with venom from that serpent's sting,
Like wild beasts huddled in a den of flame
Within the cool white palace of a king :
She rose to greet ; he deigned no glance of quest,
But went and lolled upon that cedar chest.

XIII.

I come like any haggler of the mart,
Who having sent a bauble seeks its price :
Will you forgive the meanness of my part,
And one of these fair coffers sacrifice ?
A clutch of iron fingers gript her heart
Till it seemed bursting in the cruel vice :
 And yet she quivered not, nor breathed a moan :
 Are not myself and all things here your own ?

XIV.

I thank you for the bountiful award ;
And choose, say this whereon I now sit here ?
Take any, take them all ; but that, my Lord,
Is full of household stuff and woman's gear.
I want the coffer, not what it may hoard,
However rich and beautiful and dear.
 And it is thine, she said ; and this the key :
 Her royal hand outheld it steadfastly.

XV.

Swift as a double flash from thunder-skies
The angel and the devil of his doubt
Flamed from the sombre windows of his eyes :
He went and took the key she thus held out,

And turned as if he would unlock his prize.
She breathed not ; all the air ran blood about
A swirl of terrors and wild hopes of guilt ;
Calm Weddah seized, then loosed, his dagger-hilt.

XVI.

But Walid had restrained himself, and thought :
Shall I unlock the secret of my soul,
The mystery of my Fate, that has been brought
So perfectly within my own control ?
That were indeed a work by folly wrought :
For Time, in this my vassal, must unrol
To me, and none but me, what I would learn ;
I hold the vantage, undiscerned discern.

XVII.

He summoned certain slaves, and bade them bear
The coffer he had sealed with his own seal
Into a room below with strictest care ;
And followed thoughtful at the last one's heel.
At noontide Amine found her mistress there,
Benumbed with horror, deaf to her appeal ;
The sightless eyes fixed glaring on that door
By which her soul had vanished evermore.

XVIII.

Beneath the cedar whose noonshadow large,
Level from massive trunk, outspread halfway
Adown a swardslope to the river marge,
Where rosebowers shone between the willows grey,
The wondering bearers bore their heavy charge ;
And where the central shadow thickest lay
 He bade them delve a pit, and delve it deep
 Till watersprings against their strokes should leap.

XIX.

Then waved them to a distance, while he bowed
Upon the coffer, hearkening for a space :
If truth bought that poor wretch his bloody shroud,
I bury thus her guilt and my disgrace ;
And you, as by the whole earth disavowed,
Sink into nothingness and leave no trace :
 If not, it is a harmless whim enough
 To sepulchre a chest of household stuff.

XX.

With face encircled by his hands, which leaned
Upon the wood, he challenged clear and slow :
The hollow sound, his full hot breath thus screened
Suffused his visage with a tingling glow ;

His pulse, his vesture's rustling intervened
And marred the silence : he drew back, and so
 Knelt listening yet awhile with bated breath :
 The secret lay as mute and still as death.

XXI.

Above there in her chamber Weddah might
Have leapt forth suddenly their foe to kill.
Ev'n here with hazard of swift fight and flight
Escaped or perished as a warrior still ;
But thus through him her name had suffered blight :
He locked his breath and nerves with rigid will.
 So Walid first let sink his key unused,
 Then signed the slaves back : they wrought on, he
 mused.

XXII.

Against the dark bulk swelled the waters thin ;
The stones and earth were trampled to a mound.
He then broke silence, stern and sad : Within
That coffer ye have buried, sealed and bound
Lies one of the most potent evil djinn,
Whose hate on me and mine hath darkly frowned ;
 He sought to kill your mistress : Hell and Doom
 And Allah's curse all guard this dungeon-tomb !

XXIII.

And Walid never spoke of this again ;
And none dared ask him ; for his brow grew black,
His eye flamed evil and appalling when
Some careless word but strayed upon a track
That might from far lead to it : therefore men
Spoke only of the thing behind his back.

The cedar shadow centred by that mound
Was sacredly eschewed as haunted ground.

XXIV.

But one pale phantom, noon and night and morn,
Was ever seen there ; quiet as a stone,
Huddled and shapeless, weeping tears forlorn
As silent as the dews ; her heart alone
And not her lips, whose seal was never torn,
Upbraiding sluggish death with constant moan.

Hushed whispers circled, piteous eyes were wet ;
The captive djinnee holds her captive yet.

XXV.

Thus Walid learned too well the bitter truth,
His home dissolved, its marvellous joy a cheat ;
Yet gave no sign to her : for there was ruth
Of memories gall itself left subtly sweet ;

And consciousness of wrong against her youth,
And surfeit of a vengeance so complete :
 He could not stab her bleeding heart ; her name
 With his own honour he kept pure from shame.

XXVI.

She thought Death dead, or prisoned in deep Hell
As sole assuager of the human lot :
But when the evening of the seventh day fell
Walid alone dared tread the fatal spot :
She crouched as who would plunge into a well,
Livid and writhed into a desperate knot ;
 Her fingers clutched like talons in the mould :
 Thus the last time his arms about her fold.

XXVII.

As if to glut the demon with her doom,
And break the spell, there where her corse was found
He had it buried ; and a simple tomb
Of black-domed marble sealed the dolorous mound ;
And there was set to guard the cedar gloom
A triple cirque of cypress-trees around :
 Thus Love wrought Destiny to join his slaves
 Weddah and Om-el-Bonain in their graves.

XXVIII.

True Amine, freed and richly dowered, no less
Had served until the end her lady dear ;
And shrouded for the grave that loveliness
Whose noon-eclipse left life without its peer :
Then sought the Azra in her lone distress,
And tended Abd-el-Aziz through the sere
 Forlorn last days ; and married in the clan,
 And bore brave children to a valiant man.

XXIX.

Great Walid lived long years beyond this woe,
And still increased in wealth and power and glory ;
A loyal friend, a formidable foe ;
Each Azra was his mother's child saith story ;
And he saw goodly children round him grow
To keep his name green when Death took him hoary :
 So prosperous, was he happy too? the sage
 Cites this one counsel of his reverend age :

XXX.

Have brood-mares in your stables, my young friend,
And women in your harem, but no wife :
A common daggerblade may pierce or rend,
A month bring healing ; this, the choicest knife

In Fate's whole armoury, wounds beyond amend,
And with a scratch can poison all your life ;
 And it lies naked in your naked breast
 When you are drunk with joy and sleep's rich rest.

XXXI.

As surely as a very precious stone
Finds out that jeweller who doth excel,
So surely to the bard becometh known
The tale which only he can fitly tell :
A few years thence, and Walid's heart alone
Had thrilled not to a talisman's great spell,
 His deathstone set in Hassan's golden verse ;
 Here poorly copied in cheap bronze or worse.

XXXII.

He ends : We know not which to most admire ;
The lover who went silent to his doom ;
The spouse obedient to her lord's just ire,
The mistress faithful to her lover's tomb ;
The husband calm in jealousy's fierce fire,
Who strode unswerving through the doubtful gloom
 To vengeance instant, secret and complete,
 And did not strike one blow more than was meet.

XXXIII.

With stringent cords of circumstance dark Fate
Doth certain lives here so entoil and mesh
That some or all must strangle if they wait,
And knife to cut the knots must cut quick flesh :
The first strong arm free severs ere too late ;
Fresh writhings would but tangle it afresh :
 To die with valiant fortitude, to kill
 As priest not butcher ; so much scope has will.

XXXIV.

These perished, and he slew them, in such wise
That all may meet as friends and free from shame,
Whether they meet in Hell or Paradise.
If he has won long life and power and fame,
Our darlings too have won their own set prize,
Conjoined for evermore in true love's name :
 The Azra die when they do love, of old
 Was graven with the iron pen, on gold.

XXXV.

May Allah grant eternal joy and youth
In fateless Heaven to one and all of these.
And for himself a little grain of ruth
The bard will beg, this once, while on his knees ;

Who cannot always see the very truth,
And does not always sing the truth he sees,
But something pleasanter to foolish ears
That should be tickled not with straws but spears.



TWO LOVERS.

1867.



THEIR eyes met ; flashed an instant like swift swords
That leapt unparrying to each other's heart,
Jarring convulsion through the inmost chords ;
Then fell, for they had fully done their part.

She, in the manner of her folk unveiled,
Might have been veiled for all he saw of her ;
Those sudden eyes, from which he reeled and quailed ;
The old life dead, no new life yet astir.

His good steed bore him onward slow and proud :
And through the open lattice still she leant ;
Pale, still, though whirled in a black rushing cloud,
As if on her fair flowers and dreams intent

Days passed, and he passed timid, furtive, slow :
Nights came, and he came motionless and mute ;
A steadfast sentinel till morning-glow,
Though blank her window, dumb her voice and lute.

She loved : the Cross stretched rigid arms to scare
Her soul from the perdition of that love ;
She saw Christ's wounds bleed when she knelt in prayer,
And frown abhorrent all the saints above.

He loved : the Crescent hung with sharp cold gleam,
A scimitar to cleave such love in twain ;
The Prophet menaced in his waking dream,
Livid and swoln with wrath that great brow-vein.

Each sternly true to the immortal soul,
Crushed down the passion of the mortal heart ;
Which bled away beneath the iron control,
But inwardly : they die ; none sees the smart.

Thus long months went, until his time came round
To leave that city terrible and dear ;
To go afar on soulless business bound,
Perchance for absence of a whole dead year.

No word : but as she knelt to pray one night,
What was that silk thing pendant from the Cross ?
Half of a talisman of chrysolite :
Farewell ! Full triumph stunned like fatal loss.

A sacred jewel-charm of sovereign power
'Gainst demons haunting soul and sense and brain,
'Gainst madness : had it not until that hour
Despite love's impious frenzy kept him sane ?

Now let her look forth boldly day by day ;
He will not come to wound her with his eyes ;
Now at the open lattice darkling stay,
Only the stars are watching from the skies ;

Now with clear spirit let her sing and pray ;
No human presence clouds her Lord's full light :
Now let her weep and moan and waste away,
With broken heart a-bleeding day and night.

Thin as a spectre, haggard, taciturn,
He reached his native city ; there did all
He had to do : indifferent yet stern,
As one whose task must end ere evening-fall.

Then sank, and knew that Azrael was near :
The hard dull rage of impotent remorse
Burned into passion that consumed old fear :
He loathed his unlived life, his unspent force.

“ Must we be sundered, then, beyond the grave,
By that which here has sundered us ? Not so !
I can be lost with her I cannot save,
And with these Christian dogs to deep Hell go.”

A priest baptized the sinking renegade,
A priest assured him of the Heaven he spurned ;
His wealth for many a mass thereafter paid ;
And many a Moslem his example turned.

A friend had sworn to do his last behest ;
To be his swift and faithful messenger :
His own half talisman from his true breast
Would seal the truth of all things told to her.

The funeral over, while the stars yet shone
Though pale in the new dawn, this friend forth-
spurred ;
Brief rests, long stages, hurried fiercely on ;
Hating the errand, loyal to his word.

Twenty days' travel done in thrice three days,
He reached her city, found her mansion there';
A crowd before it busy with amaze,
Cries from within it wounding the sweet air.

She was no more since that day's sun had set ;
But wonder outran grief ; for ere she died
Infinite yearning, fathomless regret,
Flooded her soul and drowned its faith and pride.

“ Shall I be happy with the saints above,
While he is burning in the paynim Hell?
Here I have cheated him of all my love,
But there with him I can for ever dwell.”

So she renounced the Cross and threefold God,
And died in Islam ; whence the bruit was great.
Silent the friend his backward journey trod,
Silent, and shrouded with the sense of Fate.

Thus in the very hour supreme of death
These two great hearts first dared live perfect life ;
Drew inspiration with their failing breath,
Snatched victory as they sank down slain in strife.

And thus faith mocked them, who when life was sweet
Had kept apart, both famished to the core ;
Let them draw near and in the death-point meet,
But to diverge for ever, evermore.

Yet both died happy in self-sacrifice ;
A dolorous happiness, yet true and deep :
And Gods and Fate and Hell and Paradise
Perchance are one to their eternal sleep.

Poor human hearts, that yearn beyond the tomb,
Wherein you all must moulder into dust !
What has the blank immitigable gloom
Of light or fervour to reward your trust ?

Live out your whole free life while yet on earth ;
Seize the quick Present, prize your one sure boon ;
Though brief, each day a golden sun has birth ;
Though dim, the night is gemmed with stars and
moon.

Love out your cordial love, hate out your hate ;
Be strong to grasp a foe, to clasp a friend :
Your wants true laws are ; thirst and hunger sate :
Feel you have been yourselves when comes the end.

Let the great gods, if they indeed exist,
Fight out their fight themselves ; for they are strong :
How can we puny mortals e'er assist ?
How judge the supra-mortal right and wrong ?

But if we made these gods, with all their strife,
And not they us : what frenzy equals this ;
To starve, maim, poison, strangle our poor life,
For empty shadows of death's dark abyss ?

This man and maiden claim a brother's tear,
Martyrs of sweet love, killed by bitter faith ;
Defrauded by the Gods of glad life here,
And mocked by Doom in their heroic death.



BERTRAM TO THE MOST NOBLE AND
BEAUTIFUL LADY, GERALDINE.

January 1857.

—o—

I.

LADY! this night for the first time my eyes,
My bodily eyes, drank in with sateless thirst
Thy noblest beauty; as when desert skies
By the full moon late-risen are immerst
In pure and solemn splendour. Not surprise
But breathless awe filled all my soul when first
You floated vision-strange before its sight;
O long-lost Star! O well-known unknown Light!

II.

Amid the murmurous hum and dusty glare,
With which those restless throngs confused the room,
I moved and gazed, with little thought or care,
So that the hours slipt smoothly through Life's loom,

Weaving gay vesture for an old despair ;
When the unearthly sense of some great doom
Approaching near possessed me, and I thrilled
With tremors too mysterious to be stilled.

III.

Rapt by that revelation from the crowd,
My eyes were lifted,—to behold your face !
While, like a silver-burning summer-cloud,
Slow-soothed by dreamful airs through azure space,
You floated past me, glorious, tranquil, proud ;
Borne gliding on with such serenest grace
By slow sweet music, that it seemed to be
Voicing thine own soul's inward harmony.

IV.

Forthwith I knew Thee, whom I had not sought
Since Youth high-hoping found no outward need,
And, ignorant that high hope its own bliss wrought,
Left Faith to die, and nursed the bitter weed
Which blooms in poisonous gauds of heartless thought.
O sole fulfilment of my heart's great need !
Vision revealing how and whence it pined !
Blessed redeemer of my sinking mind !

v.

Thy Presence was its own most adequate
Proclaimer, full-credentialled, to my soul :
An instant, and I recognised my Fate,
Yielding with solemn joy to its control.
I have been wandering in this intricate
And gloomy maze of Life, without a goal,
Baffled and hopeless ; but my future way
Lies straight and clear through life and death for aye.

vi.

And more :—as moonlight up some sombre stream
May flow in silence, a refulgent river,
Enchanting the dull line with gracious beam
Till far back toward its fount outleaps the quiver
Of free waves joyous, living in the gleam ;
Even so your Apparition did deliver
My long-dead years from blank Lethean night,
And all lived forth in your celestial light.

vii.

All glorious dreams that beautified and blest
My fervent youth were realised in Thee ;
Young longings, nobler far in their unrest
Than later moods of scornful stagnancy,

Again could heave and agitate my breast ;
My mind, long world-filled, was empowered to see
That Life has sacred mysteries unrevealed,
And grander trusts than Earth and Time can yield.

VIII.

And all this Past was thus redeemed from death,
Through its pure prescience of Thyself alone ;
Shining in splendours of unclouded faith,
Breathing in pants of love. Yes, I had known
Thee well in hours long faded ; when your breath
Thrilled all my frame, and when your dark eyes shone
With holy passion and exalted bliss,
Throughout my spirit tranced in ecstasies.

IX.

Yet it was not the eyes, large, solemn, deep—
The several features of the noble face ;
Nor wealth of hair, flung down in long-curved sweep,
Flashing like rippling sunbeams, whose embrace
Doth in so warm a glow of beauty steep
That harmony severe of stately grace
Which moulds thy form ; nor was it that full form
In its serene perfection breathing warm :—

X.

Not in all these can I find all the spell
Which thrilled such instant recognition, wild,
Yet doubtless as an holy oracle,
Throughout my being torpid and defiled.
Why should I fear this joyous truth to tell,
Which Love has murmured to his last-born child?—
Unaided by the mean of bodily sense,
Souls can reciprocate deep influence.

XI.

O music, flow for ever soft and sweet
Through subtler mazes, that in timeless dream
I may for ever watch her dove-quick feet
Circling in light adown thy shadowy stream,
And calm-robed form float, swaying to the beat
Of the long languid pulses ; while outgleam
Her face and round arms radiant through the whirls,
Grand neck, white shoulders, queenly golden curls.

XII.

Desire, by its own wild intensity,
Was baffled,—I stood trembling, panting, pale ;
And every eager step approaching Thee
Sank back : how spirits nearing Heaven must quail !

Till some strong inspiration carried me,
Half-dumb, to gasp my pleading,—and prevail ;
To sue, and stand dance-ready at thy side,
Intoxicate with love and bliss and pride.

XIII.

Oh, glory of the dance sublimed to this !
Oh pure white arm electric that embraced
Ethereal-lightly my unbounded bliss !
Oh, let me die on but another taste
Of that warm breath ambrosial, and the kiss
Of those whirl-wanton ringlets ; interlaced,
Quick frame with frame borne on ; my lips the while
Within a neck-bend of that heavenly smile !

XIV.

Did music measure that delirious dancing ?
I heard it not ; I know not what strange sway
Kept us among those spectral figures, glancing
As its poor harmonies might rule their way.
I was o'erfilled with music more entrancing,
But wild, how wild ! I could have fled astray,
Footing the buoyant æther's moonlight sea,
For ever and for ever linked with Thee.

XV.

Most pure and beautiful ! what stayed my lips,
When parched with thirsting near such ænomel,
From clinging unto thine for bee-like sips ?
From pasturing o'er thy brow's white asphodel ?
Sealing thine eyes in passion's dear eclipse,
With pressure on the full blue-veinèd swell,
And thrillings o'er the silken lashes fine,
'Mid interdraughts of their deep violet wine ?

XVI.

Yet, O Belovèd, though thus love-distraught,
Blame not my spirit ; for I felt You there
So holy-pure, that self-condemning thought
Blighted my passionate worship with despair :
Half shrank I from each touch, although it brought
Such rapture with it as I scarce could bear,
As if from harp strings ready tuned above,
To vibrate forth seraphic bliss and love.

XVII.

I felt You as a flower, my hand I knew
With touch the lightest-tender still must harm ;
Or gem so lucenter than morning dew,
That my least breath must sully its pure charm :

The cold white moon cresting night's cloudless blue
Above dark moorland, far from town and farm,
Or few wan stars dim-steadfast in dim skies,
Are not so dowered with awe-fraught sanctities.

XVIII.

Ay, while I thought : Could I seize one caress,
But one grand grape from this full-fruited vine ;
Grasp the rich ripeness, press and press and press,
Till drunk with its last drain of glorious wine ;
Staking the Future's infinite barrenness
'Gainst one transcendent moment's bliss divine !—
Even then, my wildered spirit knelt subdued
Beneath thy pure calm noble maidenhood.

XIX.

Subdued by Thee,—and yet exalted more !
Calmed by perfection of resolve and pride !
The future *was* drear-barren as a shore
Wave-wasted by an ever wintry tide :
But *now* !—Shall he, whose sanest hopes may soar
To win the empire's Empress for his bride,
Purloin a jewel from her crownèd brow ?
Be kingly, heart ! the throne awaits us now.

XX.

Thou wert the farther from me, as so near ;

 Veiled awful, at a distance dim and great,
In that supernal spiritual sphere

 To which Love lifts, that he may isolate
The truest lovers from their union here :

 Hence their eternal Bridal, consecrate
By perfect reverence ; for the Loved must be
An ever-new Delight and Mystery.

XXI.

Did aught of these tempestuous agitations

 In irrepressible gust or lightning-burst
Perturb thy heaven of starry contemplations

 In depths of moonlit quietude immerst ?
I long for answer ; but no meditations

 Can realise those memories, all disperst
In such wild seething mists of joy, hope, fear :—
Oh, that the question now could reach thine ear !

XXII.

But when I saw the end must come indeed,

 When laggard pairs were failing from the dance,
Surely my curbless thoughts found words to plead :—

 “ Forgive, sweet Maiden !—Time and Circumstance

Are lightning-swift, and I must match their speed.

Believe me, that I speak in heavenly trance
Diviner truth than souls can reach or prove
When uninspired by seraph-sighted Love.

XXIII.

“ The Vision sways me ; I must speak or die :

Life of my life ! I see, I know, I feel ;

The inspiration cannot err or lie ;

Passion doth its own truth with pure fire seal ;—

God from the depths of all Eternity

Created us One Soul, in woe or weal,

In life and death, in union or apart :

Whisper but ‘ Yea,’ assuring my sure heart !

XXIV.

“ You tremble pallid, with the same new birth

Of Love, the pure eternal Seraph-child !

Flooding with fulness all our deadly dearth,

Is it not strange and fierce and rapture-wild ?

I have dim memory that in yon poor earth

Where late I grovelled hopeless and defiled

A mortal thing called Love with doubt and pain

Is reared : scarce one his sole true Bride can gain.

XXV.

“But time is very brief:—Shall we away
 Into the great calm Night besprinkled o’er
With silver throbbing stars? My Dearest, say!
 And yet, so rich in years is Evermore
That hurry were mean thrift: we well can say,
 Who long have stayed, some few brief time-lives more;
Being so certain from this hour sublime
Of coming Union, perfect, beyond Time.”

XXVI.

Were such words borne exultant on my breath?
 Memory, which cannot oversoar the deep
That yawns between two lives in sombre death,
 Nor even that ’twixt wakefulness and sleep,
Brings no sure tidings: yet, unmoved in faith,
 Though sick with failing from that glorious steep
Whence all the Promised Land was seen so clear,
I plod Time’s desert with more hope than fear.

XXVII.

Yes, though I now feel faint and spiritless,—
 For when such fire of rapture burns down low
We shivering cower, unmanned by chill distress,
 Over the embers while the bleak winds blow;

With dismal dread that such rich blessedness
Will never more within our cold hearts glow ;
Till in the bitter dark we almost deem
That vanished glory a delusive dream ;—

XXVIII.

Yet have I even now deep confidence
In those great oracles of solemn bliss
Uttered so clearly to my spirit's sense
By heavenly Love who pure and perfect is ;
Yet must I cherish them with reverence
Though scornful voices from our world-abyss
Proclaim the manness of both Him and them :
This staff sustains,—may fruit yet crown its stem !

XXIX.

Perchance we never more till death shall meet :
You dwell on far high places of the earth,
'Midst well-befitting pomp ; beneath your feet
I labour humbly, not assured from dearth,—
The hard-won bread itself most bitter-sweet.
Were I your peer in wealth and worldly birth
You still might justly scorn my love and me ;
Yet none the less must I live loving Thee.

xxx.

It is my fate ; your soul hath conquered mine ;
And I must be your slave and glory in
The bondage whether cruel or benign.
Still let me cherish hopes even here to win
By strenuous toil the far-off Prize divine ;
And feed on visions, not so shadowy-thin,
Of gaining You beneath a nobler sun
Should I in this life's battle be undone.

xxxI.

And with my passionate love for evermore
Is blended pure and reverent gratitude ;
Nor can I this full sacrifice deplore
Though You should scorn me whom You have subdued,
Or know not what devotion I outpour.
Ah, from this timeless night what boundless good
Your Presence hath bestowed on me !—no less
That I am stung with my unworthiness.

xxxII.

Dark winter ruled a desert of drear frost ;
Spring's breath stole softly o'er its ice and snow ;
All life revives which had so long been lost,
Trees green, flowers bloom, birds sing, and fountains flow ;

The realm is laughing wide from coast.

Dear May of its redemption! while we know
It seemed unworthy of thy Spring-love tender,
That love yet fits it for full Summer splendour.

XXXIII.

Henceforth my life shall not unearnest prove ;

It hath an ardent aim, a glorious goal :

Numb Faith re-lives ; You from your sphere above

Have planted and must nourish in my soul

That priceless blessing, pure and fervent love,

O'er which no thought of self can have control.

If with these boons come ever-longing pain,

It shall be welcomed for the infinite gain.

XXXIV.

Be pain unnoticed in a doom like this !

I see eyes gazing on my weary night

Like cold strange stars from out the world-abyss ;

They gaze with scorn or pity : but their sight

Is banished from my inward golden bliss,

Floating divinely in the noonday light

Of Thee round whom I circle—O far Sun,

Through mirk and shine alike the earth's true course is
run !

THE FADELESS BOWER.

1858.

—o—

I.

ATHWART the gloom of haunted years,
Whose phantoms mock my lonely woe,
I gaze, and see through glimmering tears
A Vision of the Long-ago :
From out the waste verge dim and far
How purely gleams that single star !

II.

Shine forth, sole star !—The dear old bower,
And I therein alone with Her,
In that rich summer's crowning hour,
Whose quiet breathings scarcely stir
The woof of leaves and tendrils thin
Through which faint moonlight ripples in.

III.

I have this moment told my love ;
 Kneeling, I clasp her hands in mine :
She does not speak, she does not move ;
 The silent answer is divine.
The flood of rapture swells till breath
Is almost tranced in deathless death.

IV.

Had He whom, 'midst the whirlwind's roar,
 That fiery chariot's living light
Far through the Heaven of Heavens upbore,
 Consuming space with meteor-flight,
God's glory dazzling on his gaze,—
Had *he* then breath for prayer or praise ?

V.

The bower is very dim and still ;
 But clustering in the copses near
Sweet nightingales impassioned thrill
 The night with utterance full and clear
Of love and love's harmonious jars,
As glorious as the shining stars.

VI.

My lips still lie upon her hand,
 Quivering and faint beyond the kiss ;
The heavens before my soul expand
 Athrob with dazzling light and bliss ;
He in his fiery car sublime
Soared not more swiftly out of Time.

VII.

Behold her as she standeth there,
 Breathless, with fixed awe-shadowed eyes
Beneath her moon-touched golden hair !
 Her spirit's pure humilities
Are trembling, half would disavow
The crown I bring to crown her brow.

VIII.

Unworthy crown ; and yet her life
 Was set on gaining it alone :
And now in triumph without strife
 Led upward to the queenly throne,
She falters from the sceptre's weight,
While flushed with high-wrought pride elate.

IX.

The simple folds of white invest
Her noble form, as purest snow
Some far and lovely mountain-crest
Faint-flushed with all the dawn's first glow ;
Alone, resplendent, lifted high
Into the clear vast breathless sky.

X.

The bower is hushed and still as death ;
The moonlight melting through its gloom
Is mingled with the languid breath
Of roses steeped in liquid bloom,
That bare their inmost hearts this night
To drink in deep the dew and light.

XI.

So Thou, my Rose, my perfect Queen
Of Beauty, float and breathe, nor move,
In this enchanted air serene,
Unfolding all thy heart to love ;
Drink in this dew of heavenly wine,
This light which is a soul divine.

XII.

The Vision fades . . . ah, woe, woe, woe!—
While dreamed that summer's sun-tranced hours
The ghastly Hand was creeping slow
Through all their maze of leaves and flowers,
And tore my Rose off when her breath
Was sweetest : O remorseless Death!—

XIII.

Could that one hour have been drawn out
Until the end of Time's whole range !
We rapt away, so sphered about,
And made eternal, free from change ;
In heart and mind, in soul and frame
Preserved for evermore the same !

XIV.

The life of that great town afar
Would breathe its murmur vast and dim,
With all the multitudinous jar
Sublimed into a solemn hymn,
Mysterious, soothing, evermore,
As heaven may here our harsh Life-roar :

XV.

The overtrailing passion-flower
Gaze ever on the starry sky
With all its constellated bower
Of large and starlike blooms, which lie
Amidst their golden fruit beset
With leaves and tendrils dark-dew-wet :

XVI.

And I for ever kneel there still,
With lifted eyes whose yearning sight
Could never drink its perfect fill
From those dear eyes of love and light,
In which to me thy thoughts shine clear
As yon high stars in yon blue sphere :

XVII.

Entranced above the worded Yes,
All flushed and pale with rapturous shame,
In that dim moonlit quietness
You stand for evermore the same,
Fairer than heaven, the Queen who now
Is trembling as I crown her brow.

XVIII.

Some ardent Seraph from above,
Some Angel ever growing young,
Would find this Eden of our love,
Sequestered all the worlds among ;
With silent pinions gliding bright
Into our calm enchanted night.

XIX.

And, ushered by the chant divine
Of yonder deathless nightingales,
Through all the tree-shades reach our shrine ;
And softly drawing back the veils
Of foliage let some fuller stream
Of moonlight bathe thy beauty's dream.

XX.

And gazing long, until his form
Might seem as fixed in trance as we,
Serenely perfect breathing warm,
Would sigh a sigh of mystery,
Half vague regrets, half longings sweet ;
Then slow with lingering plumes retreat :

XXI.

Murmuring, " It is a goddess born,
But left with mortals from her birth,
None knew that she was thus forlorn ;
Till this one youth of all the earth,
Inspired to see her as divine,
Knelt down in reverence at her shrine.

XXII.

" Her native instincts roused to life
Leap up to claim the worship due,
Are breaking with imperial strife
The bonds of earthly custom through ;
Yet still remains some sweet half-fear
At entrance to the unknown sphere.

XXIII.

" But, oh, what glory, triumph, bliss,
The sudden revelation wrought !
What power had that young mortal's kiss
To thrill her thus beyond all thought ?
She shares with him the Heavenly throne
Which he hath made indeed her own.

XXIV.

“ And hence while every other earth
Rolls circling through the vast abyss
With interchange of death and birth,
And night and day, and woe and bliss,
One sphere is kept for these always
Above all growth and all decay.

XXV.

“ And here she blooms, a budded rose,
Whose crimson fire of life new-lit
Is ever fervent to unclothe
The many-petalled wealth of it,
Embalmed from reaching to that prime
Which fades so soon in sultry Time.

XXVI.

“ New dawn, fair fairer than the noon ;
Hope, kinglier than thy crowning day ;
Young spring’s green promise fresh and boon,
No wealthiest summer’s fruit can pay ;
Dreamland, so rich beyond life’s bounds ;
Silence, more sweet than all sweet sounds !

XXVII.

“ While he who once was mean and poor
Is climbing strenuous toward the throne,
He breathes a loftier joy be sure
Than when the prize is made his own,
When reft of hope and valiant strife
He paces lordly-level life.

XXVIII.

“ O happy bud, for ever young,
For ever just about to blow !
O happy love, upon whose tongue
The Yes doth ever trembling grow !
O happiest Twain, whose deathless bower
Embalms you in life’s crowning hour !” . . .

XXIX.

The Seraph-murmurs die out low,
As fades the Vision, fades the Bower.
The bower *has* faded long ago ;
The roses and the passion-flower
Have rotted in the sodden mould ;
The new place quite forgets the old.

XXX.

Ah, Alice, if I dream and dream,
What else is left me in this life?
New faces all about me teem,
New hopes and woes and loves are rife :
I overlived my own self, Dear,
In lingering when you left me here.

XXXI.

And so my heart must soar away
To where alone its treasure is :
Despite my dream that we should stay
Entranced in unfulfilling bliss,
What fiery longings burn my breast
To reach, to gain, to be possessed !

XXXII.

Then fade, dim dream ! and Sorrow, cease !
While I can trust, where'er you be,
That you are waiting my release
To live out to its depth with me,
In bowers or dens through noble spheres
The love suspended all these years.

GARIBALDI REVISITING
ENGLAND.

1864.

—o—

I.

THIS day all the eyes of our millions
Are fixed on the south, where the light
Of the waves of the Channel laughs fearless
Round the thunder-clouds stored with our might ;
This day the great heart of the people
Is throbbing expectant, upstirred
By a pride and a joy and a sorrow
The voice of those thunders should word.

II.

For what is this mighty heart glowing ?
For what do these earnest eyes scan ?
It glows for a hero and martyr,
They look for a patriot, a Man ;

For a hero supreme in the battle,
A martyr no griefs could subdue,
A patriot the soul of his country,
A man to the people all-true :

III.

For him who as grandly defended
As grandly MAZZINI ruled Rome ;
For him who gave Sicily, Naples,
To those who had bartered his home ;
For him who on sad Aspromonte
Was pierced by a countryman's ball,—
Tu Brute ! this Cæsar worst-wounded
In soul yet forgiveth it all.

IV.

Oh, let us, we people of England,
We millions the worst and the best,
Give welcome true, solemn, and thoughtful,
Befitting the worth of our guest.
All titles and wealth which the monarch
Could proffer this man is above ;
The people alone can reward him
In his own golden coin, loyal love.

v.

Nor let us forget in the shoutings
And feasts of the triumph they plan,
That he comes not alone in his glory ;
The Nation is here in the Man :
Enceladus Italy, risen
With earthquake, but pausing distrest ;
The left arm still brutally fettered,
And Peter's rock crushing the breast.

Evviva a te, magnanimo
Ribelle ! A la tua fronte
Più sacri lauri crebbero
Le selve d' Aspromonte.

Chi vinse te? Deh, cessino
I vanti disonesti :
Te vinse amor di patria,
E nel cader vincesti.

Evviva a te, magnanimo
Ribelle e precursore !
Il culto a te de' posterì,
Con te d' Italia è il cuore !

Io bevo a 'l dì che fausto
L' eterna Roma schiuda
Non a' Seidni ignobili
A i Tigellini a i Giuda,

Sì a libertà che vindice
 Dell' umano pensiero
 Spezzi la falsa cattedra
 Del successor di Piero.

Sii maledetto:—e d' odio
 Con inesauste brame
 I fraticidi il premano
 Onde Aspromonte è infame.

Odio di dei Prometeo,
 Arridi a' figli tuoi:
 Solcati anche dal fulmine,
 Pur l' avvenir siam noi.

GIOSUÈ CARDUCCI: *Dopo Aspromonte.*

—o—

EUROPE'S ROUGE ET NOIR.

(*After Mentana.*)

THERE has been a slight run on the black, we know;
 But those who have thereby won,
 Lost very much more not long ago,
 And, their desperate martingales clearly show,
 Will lose all before they've done.

THE JOLLY VETERANS.

1857.

—o—

I.

COME rest, come rest, my leal old friends,
Loll at ease round the old round table ;
Now the sun descends and our duty ends,
We'll have mirth as long as we're able.

CHORUS.

Then for all the rich blood we have ever outpoured
Let us pour in the red wine fairly ;
Though our hands have warred till weak for the sword,
They can wield round the wine-cup rarely.

II.

We have marched, we have fought, in the sweltry sun
All the day since reveillé's blaring ;
Now the march is done and the field is won
We've a right to rest and good faring.

Then for all, &c.

III.

See a rich warm light in the west still glows
Though the sun has sunk before us,
Though the grey shades close on the earth's repose,
And the black night gathers o'er us.

Then for all, &c.

IV.

Though our voices break as our songs we troll,
Though our eyes and our limbs fail weary,
Let each trusty soul have his pipe and his bowl,
And the last few hours shall be cheery.

Then for all, &c.

V.

Till the thick night wraps both the vale and the steep
Where through bad luck and good we fought fair, boys ;
Till we sink in the deep, in the long still sleep,
Which shall drown all troubles and care, boys.

Then for all, &c.

VI.

And what reck we, when that sleep is out,
What may come with the dawn of the morrow?
We shall rise fresh and stout, with the old hearts, no doubt,
To confront toil and danger and sorrow.

Then for all, &c.

A CAPSTAN CHORUS.

1857.

—o—

I.

ROLLING along, bowling along,
Over the seas we go ;
And we heave up our anchor singing our song,
With a Yeo, cheery men, yeo !
Yeo, cheery men, yeo !

II.

The winds and the waves they will beat us about,
And the rocks lie a-waiting below ;
But our yards they are trim and our timbers are stout ;
Sing a Yeo, cheery men, yeo !
Yeo, cheery men, yeo !

III.

Monstrous and terrible growls the old sea
When storms make his white rage grow ;
Grim death lurks then in his heart for we ;
But Yeo, cheery men, yeo !
Yeo, cheery men, yeo !

IV.

For well are we nursed on his broad boon breast
When his rage shall overblow,
Fed full of the free bold life which is best ;
Sing a Yeo, cheery men, yeo !
Yeo, cheery men, yeo !

V.

How he swings him along 'neath his ocean of air
In his great heart's careless flow !
How we win his love when his wrath we dare !
Sing a Yeo, cheery men, yeo !
Yeo, cheery men, yeo !

VI.

Rolling along, bowling along,
Over the seas we go ;
And we heave up our anchor singing our song,
With a Yeo, cheery men, yeo !
Yeo, cheery men, yeo !

POLYCRATES ON WATERLOO
BRIDGE.

1865.



LET no mortals dare to be
Happier in their lives than we :
Thus the jealous gods decree.

This decree was never heard,
Never by their lips averred,
Yet on high stands registered.

I have read it, and I fear
All the gods above, my Dear,
All must envy us two here.

Let us, then, propitiate
These proud satraps of sole Fate ;
Our hearts' wealth is all too great.

Say, what rich and cherished thing
Can I to the river fling
As a solemn offering ?

O belovèd Meerschaum Pipe,
Whose pink bloom would soon be ripe,
Must thou be the chosen type ?

Cloud-compeller ! Foam o' the Sea,
Whence rose Venus fair and free
On some poet's reverie !

In the sumptuous silken-lined
Case where thou hast lain enshrined
Thou must now a coffin find !

And, to drag thee surely down,
Lo ! I tie my last half-crown :
We shall have to walk through town.

Penny toll is paid, and thus
All the bridge is free to us ;
But no cab, nor even a 'bus !

Far I fling thee through the gloom ;
Sink into thy watery tomb,
O thou consecrate to Doom !

May no sharp police, while they track
Spoils thrown after some great "crack,"
Ever, ever bring thee back !

No mudlarkers, who explore
Every ebb the filthy floor,
Bring thee to the day once more !

No sleek cook—I spare the wish ;
Dead dogs, cats, and suchlike fish,
Surely are not yet a dish ? . . .

Gods ! the dearest, as I wis,
Of my treasures offered is ;
Pardon us our heavenly bliss !

What Voice murmurs full of spleen ?
Not that Pipe, but——Ssss ! how mean
All the gods have ever been !

S H A M E L E S S .

Kew Gardens.

1865.

—o—

THAT irreverent scoundrel grinned as he passed ;
And perhaps we *did* look silly !
As I on you those sheep's-eyes cast,
Which you cast back willy-nilly :

While both my hands patted your dear little hand,
As if in a fit of abstraction ;
And you let it lie at their command,
Quite unaware of the action !

A deaf mute, say, for the first time sees
A youth and a damsel dancing,
With their bows, twirls, shuffles, and one-two-threes,
Retreating and advancing.

He hears not the music, he finds no cause
For such bewildering antic ;
He thinks the poor creatures obey no laws,
But are certainly daft or frantic.

So one who has felt not the love which rules
And stirs, the harmonious passion,
Must deem us lovers demented fools
To act in so queer a fashion.

I have heard that this theme in the assonant rhyme
Has been sung with a beauty entrancing :
The Spaniards have ever been sublime
In passionate love and dancing.



THE FIRE THAT FILLED
MY HEART OF OLD.

1864.

—o—

I.

THE fire that filled my heart of old
Gave lustre while it burned ;
Now only ashes grey and cold
Are in its silence urned.
Ah ! better was the furious flame,
The splendour with the smart :
I never cared for the singer's fame,
But, oh ! for the singer's heart
Once more—
The burning fulgent heart !

II.

No love, no hate, no hope, no fear,
No anguish and no mirth ;
Thus life extends from year to year,
A flat of sullen dearth.

Ah ! life's blood creepeth cold and tame,
Life's thought plays no new part :
I never cared for the singer's fame,
But, oh ! for the singer's heart
Once more—
The bleeding passionate heart !



WITHERED LEAVES.

1857.

—o—

I.

LET the roses lie, dear,
Let them lie ;
They are all thrown by, dear,
All thrown by :
What should they do now but quickly die ?

II.

Yester morn they flourished
Fresh and fair ;
Dew and sunlight nourished,
Bloomed they there,
Blushing as their sweetness felt the air.

III.

Yester eve he tore them
From the tree ;
Stars that glimmered o'er them,
Two or three,
Set not ere they perished, woe is me !

IV.

Scarcely seem they dead yet—
Death is new ;
See the petals red yet,
Scent and dew,
All as when in life they blushing grew.

V.

Touch them yet I dare not
While they show
As if dead they were not ;
Ah ! I know
Dreams of life in death but madden woe.

VI.

Let them lie and wither,
As is right ;
I may then steal hither
In the night ;
Find them wan and shrivelled in death's blight ;

VII.

Gather each leaf slowly
From its nook ;
Hoard them up as holy
In the Book
Wherein Memory now for Hope must look.

THE CYPRESS AND THE ROSES.

1858.

—o—

ROSES and roses year by year
Do I plant and cherish here,
With many a wistful sigh and tear,
Cradling new in the self-same bier
 Where the dead be.
Hope and care and love betrayed !
Blighted buds, they all, all fade
In the constant deadly shade
 Of this cypress tree.

One black cypress shade will blight
Myriads of roses of delight ;
One stern cypress will outlast
Ages of roses withering fast,
 Too well I see.
What is left me now to do ?
What, but sink at the dark root too ;
Let the baleful gloom and rue
 Kill also me.

MEETING AGAIN.

1860.



I.

YOUR eyes were burning with wild love and woe ;
They seared my inmost heart :
We knew, we knew too well that I must go,
Yet could not bear to part.

II.

We did not blame each other ; that worst gall
Of common sin was spared ;
Nor vindicate ourselves : confessing all,
In silence each despaired.

III.

One yearning overwhelmed all strength and hope,—
That then and there we might
Sink down, embracing, under heaven's cope,
Engulfed in death's deep night.

IV.

And now again, after long bitter years,
We are allowed to meet,

And mingle henceforth all our sighs and tears
While these two hearts shall beat :

V.

I from that fearful world where I was cast
Among the multitude,
To expiate the inexpiable Past
By constant doing good :

VI.

You from the sterner solitary life,
By woe and sin possessed,
And waging with them constant deadly strife
Within thine own poor breast.

VII.

Ah ! can you really love me, whom you know
So weak and foul of yore ?
Dear heart ! *I* feel that evil long-ago
But makes me love you more.

VIII,

Yet still that longing almost swayeth me,—
That we should sink down deep,
And side by side, from life's sore burthen free,
Sleep death's eternal sleep.

TWO SONNETS.

1860.



I.

“ WHY are your songs all wild and bitter-sad
As funeral dirges with the orphans’ cries?
Each night since first the world was made hath had
A sequent day to laugh it down the skies.
Chant us a glee to make our hearts rejoice,
Or seal in silence this unmanly moan.”
My friend, I have no power to rule my voice :
A spirit lifts me where I lie alone,
And thrills me into song by its own laws ;
That which I feel, but seldom know, indeed
Tempering the melody it could not cause.
The bleeding heart cannot for ever bleed
Inwardly solely : on the wan lips too
Dark blood will bubble ghastly into view.

II.

Striving to sing glad songs, I but attain
 Wild discords sadder than Grief's saddest tune ;
As if an owl with his harsh screech should strain
 To over-gratulate a thrush of June.
The nightingale upon its thorny spray
 Finds inspiration in the sullen dark ;
The kindling dawn, the world-wide joyous day
 Are inspiration to the soaring lark ;
The seas are silent in the sunny calm,
 Their anthem-surges in the tempest boom ;
The skies outroll no solemn thunder-psalm
 Till they have clothed themselves with clouds of
 gloom.
My mirth can laugh and talk, but cannot sing ;
My grief finds harmonies in everything.



A SONG OF SIGHING.

1868.

—o—

I.

WOULD some little joy to-day
Visit us, heart !
Could it but a moment stay,
Then depart,
With the flutter of its wings
Stirring sense of brighter things.

II.

Like a butterfly astray
In a dark room ;
Telling :—Outside there is day,
Sweet flowers bloom,
Birds are singing, trees are green,
Runnels ripple silver sheen.

III.

Heart ! we now have been so long
Sad without change,
Shut in deep from shine and song,
Nor can range ;
It would do us good to know
That the world is not all woe.

IV.

Would some little joy to-day
Visit us, heart !
Could it but a moment stay,
Then depart,
With the lustre of its wings
Lighting dreams of happy things,
Oh sad my heart !



“ALLACE ! THAT SAMYN SWEIT
FACE !” *

1865.

—o—

I.

“ALLACE ! that samyn sweet face !”

Bitter tears have drowned the shine
Wont to laugh in azure eyne ;
Fear hath blanched the laughing lips,
And they tremble trying to speak ;
Pain hath cast a wan eclipse
On the round and rosy cheek ;
Grief hath greyed the locks ; and how
Care hath wrinkled that smooth brow !

“Allace ! that samyn sweet face !”

Sweet then, yet sweeter now !

* “ In 1549 was printed at St. Andrew's a curious work entitled ‘ Vedderburn's Complaite of Scotlande,’ in which are preserved the titles of no less than thirty-seven songs.”—*The Book of Scottish Song*, by Alex. Whitelaw : Preface, p. v. Among the thirty-seven titles is this most pathetic one, “ Allace ! that samyn sweet face.”

II.

"Allace ! that samyn sweet face !"

Eyes have lost the light of youth,
But have kept their loving truth ;
Lips that tremble while they speak
 Speak the words that ravish me ;
And the forpined hollow cheek,
 Oh, it breaks my heart to see !
Hair yet witnesseth a vow ;
Loyalty is on the brow :

"Allace ! that samyn sweet face !"

Sweet then, yet sweetest now !

III.

"Allace ! that samyn sweet face !"

Could one kindle up those eyes,
Think you, with a love-surprise ?
Could a rain of kisses turn
 Those poor lips to bloom once more ?
Would those wan cheeks swell and burn,
 Fed with joys of heretofore ?
Would caressing hands allow
Not a furrow on that brow ?

"Allace ! that samyn sweet face !"

Dear then, yet dearest now !

D A Y.

1866.



WAKING one morning
In a pleasant land,
By a river flowing
Over golden sand :—

Whence flow ye, waters,
O'er your golden sand ?
We come flowing
From the Silent Land.

Whither flow ye, waters,
O'er your golden sand ?
We go flowing
To the Silent Land.

And what is this fair realm ?
A grain of golden sand
In the great darkness
Of the Silent Land.

N I G H T.

1864.



HE cried out through the night :

“Where is the light ?

Shall nevermore

Open Heaven's door ?

Oh, I am left

Lonely, bereft !”

He cried out through the night :

It spread vaguely white,

With its ghost of a moon

Above the dark swoon

Of the earth lying chill,

Breathless, grave-still.

He cried out through the night :

His voice in its might

Rang forth far and far,
And then like a star
Dwindled from sense
In the Immense.

He cried out through the night :
No answering light,
No syllabled sound ;
Beneath and around
A long shuddering thrill,
Then all again still.



MATER TENEBRARUM.

1859.

—o—

I.

IN the endless nights, from my bed, where sleepless in
anguish I lie,
I startle the stillness and gloom with a bitter and strong
cry :
O Love ! O Belovèd long lost ! come down from thy
Heaven above,
For my heart is wasting and dying in uttermost famine
for love !
Come down for a moment ! oh, come ! Come serious and
mild
And pale, as thou wert on this earth, thou adorable
Child !
Or come as thou art, with thy sanctitude, triumph and
bliss,

For a garment of glory about thee ; and give me one
kiss,
One tender and pitying look of thy tenderest eyes,
One word of solemn assurance and truth that the soul
with its love never dies !

II.

In the endless nights, from my bed, where sleepless in
frenzy I lie,
I cleave through the crushing gloom with a bitter and
deadly cry :
Oh ! where have they taken my Love from our Eden of
bliss on this earth,
Which now is a frozen waste of sepulchral and horrible
dearth ?
Have they killed her indeed ? is her soul as her body,
which long
Has mouldered away in the dust where the foul worms
throng ?
O'er what abhorrent Lethes, to what remotest star,
Is she rapt away from my pursuit through cycles and
systems far ?
She is dead, she is utterly dead ; for her life would hear
and speed
To the wild imploring cry of my heart that cries in its
dreadful need.

III.

In the endless nights, on my bed, where sleeplessly
brooding I lie,
I burden the heavy gloom with a bitter and weary sigh :
No hope in this worn-out world, no hope beyond the
tomb ;
No living and loving God, but blind and stony Doom.
Anguish and grief and sin, terror, disease and despair :
Why throw not off this life, this garment of torture I
wear,
And go down to sleep in the grave in everlasting rest ?
What keeps me yet in this life, what spark in my frozen
breast ?
A fire of dread, a light of hope, kindled, O Love, by thee ;
For thy pure and gentle and beautiful soul, it must
immortal be.



A R E Q U I E M.

1858.



THOU hast lived in pain and woe,
Thou hast lived in grief and fear ;
Now thine heart can dread no blow,
Now thine eyes can shed no tear :
 Storms round us shall beat and rave ;
 Thou art sheltered in the grave.

Thou for long, long years hast borne,
Bleeding through Life's wilderness,
Heavy loss and wounding scorn ;
Now thine heart is burdenless :
 Vainly rest for ours we crave ;
 Thine is quiet in the grave.

We must toil with pain and care,
We must front tremendous Fate,
We must fight with dark Despair :
Thou dost dwell in solemn state,
 Couched triumphant, calm and brave,
 In the ever-holy grave.

PROMETHEUS.

(*After Goethe.*)



OVERCAST thy heaven, Zeus,
With thunder-clouds ;
And practise, like a boy
Beheading thistles,
On broad oaks and mountain-tops ;
You must yet leave me
My solid earth,
And my hut, which you built not,
And my hearth, whose glow
You envy me.

I know nothing poorer
Under the sun than you gods !
Miserably feeds
On tribute of sacrifice
And breath of prayer,

Your Majesty ;
And would starve were not
Children and beggars
The fools of hope.

When I was a child,
And knew not how to help myself,
I raised to the sun my erring glance,
As if on high had been
An ear to hear my plaint,
A heart, like my own,
To compassionate the distressed.

Who helped me
Against the Titanic insolence ?
Who delivered me from death ?
From slavery ?
Hast thou not all thyself accomplished,
Inviolatè glowing heart ?
And didst glow, young and good, and duped,
Grateful for deliverance
To the Sleeper above there ?

I honour thee ? Wherefore ?
Hast thou ever soothed the pangs
Of the oppressed ?

Hast thou ever dried the tears
Of the afflicted ?
Have I not been forged to manhood *
By Time the omnipotent
And eternal Destiny,
My Lords and thine ?

Didst thou really think
I should hate life,
And flee to the deserts,
Because not all
My dream-blossoms ripened ?
Here sit I, form men
After my image,
A race resembling me,
To suffer, to weep,
To enjoy and rejoice,
Careless of you,
As I myself !

* Forged, in the original *geschmiedet*, *smith-ed*, wrought with fire and hard hammering ; a term magnificently correct.

FROM THE "WEST-ÖSTLICHER DIVAN."



LADY, say what mean those whispers?
What so softly moves your lips?
Whispering to your own self there,
Sweeter than the sweet wine sips!
Think you to your mouth's twin sisters
Thus to draw another pair!

I will kiss! will kiss! I murmured.

Look! how in the doubtful darkness
All in bloom the branches glow;
Downward glitters star on star;
Greening through the leafage low
Rubies by the thousand sparkle:
Yet from all thy soul is far.

I will kiss! will kiss! I murmured.

Even thus, afar, thy lover
Proveth now the bitter-sweet,
Feeleth an unblissful bliss.
Solemnly you vowed to greet
At the full moon, greet each other ;
Now the very moment is.

I will kiss! will kiss! I murmur.



[AFTER HEINE.]

CHILDHOOD

(*To his Sister.*)



My child, we both were children,
And merry days we saw,
We used to creep into the fowl-house
And hide there under the straw.

And then we set up a crowing ;
The people who passed on the road —
Cock-a-doodle-doo !—they thought it
Was really a cock that crowed.

The cases that lay in our courtyard,
We fitted them up with care ;
And made a magnificent mansion,
And lived together there.

And the cat of our next-door neighbour
Came to visit us too ;
We gave our best bows and courtseys,
With compliments fine and new.

As to her health we asked her,
With friendly and earnest air ;
Many old cats have we since asked
The like with the like deep care.

And often we sat discussing,
As if we were old and grey ;
Bemoaning how things were better,
Better indeed, in our day.

How Love, Truth, Faith had vanished,
And left the world all bad ;
How the price of coffee was shameful,
And money was not to be had ! . . .

Past, past, are the sports of our childhood,
And all rolls past in sooth,—
The World, and Time, and Money,
And Faith, and Love, and Truth.

By the same Author.

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT,

AND OTHER POEMS.

LONDON : REEVES & TURNER, 196 STRAND.

Price 5s. ; large paper copies, 10s.

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

“ It is at least ten years since a real unmistakable poet has revealed himself in England. Mr. Swinburne’s ‘Atalanta’ was published in 1865, Mr. Morris’s ‘Jason’ in 1868, Mr. Rossetti’s poems were published for the world in 1870, and even then the most precious of them were not exactly new. A year ago one might have said, without any disrespect to many accomplished writers whose work is often praiseworthy and sometimes enjoyable, that one lost little or nothing in neglecting any living English poet except the three already named and Mr. Tennyson and Mr. Browning, whose fame has been safe and sealed these twenty years.

“ A pessimist might think it of evil omen that we should have had to wait so long for a new poet ; of worse omen that he should be a pessimist himself, who dedicates his work ‘to Giacomo Leopardi, the younger brother of Dante ;’ of worse omen still that he should be a relapsed pessimist who has struggled into daylight and gone back into the darkness. . . . Even Lamartine hardly imagined that he was ‘Raphael,’ and Mr. Thomson, a manlier and simpler writer, knows that he never reigned in the ‘Castle of Indolence’ ; but after all, nothing tells us so much of the young Lamartine as ‘Raphael,’ and we pity the denizen of the ‘City of Dreadful Night’ more when we recognise the gracious traits of what he must have been ‘*nella sua vita nuova*’ in the ‘Lord of the Castle of Indolence,’ written in 1859. . . . Entire originality of invention is not exactly Mr. Thomson’s forte. But this does not matter much ; the splendid symbolism with which he invests what he borrows is all his own.

“ One can trace the influence of what is sweetest and simplest in Browning, of what is richest in ‘Maud,’ as well as the influence of

Heine, in two very fresh idyls of Cockaigne called 'Sunday at Hampstead' and 'Sunday up the River.' They date from 1863 to 1865, and open the series of the author's brightest, sanest, and most varied work. What strikes one first, perhaps, is the writer's absolute and courageous content with circumstances which have a sordid side to them. . . . There is the same touch of cynicism in some distichs on Art, written in 1865. . . . The quatrains under the same heading which come before on the thesis that passion leaves no room for prettiness or skill, have more of Heine's charm and subtlety than most translations of Heine, including Mr. Thomson's. . . . 'The City of Dreadful Night' is not a poem, nor a series of poems; it seems as if the writer had intended at one time to compose a continuous poem in stanzas of seven lines, like those of 'Our Ladies of Death' (except that the fifth and sixth lines are always written upon double rhymes, managed with rare and admirable ease), and at another had contemplated a series of poems on his own experience and observations there, in which the narrative should be written in stanzas of six lines, a quatrain followed by a distich, while the words of other speakers are thrown into simpler and more emphatic metres. The fragments of each scheme are exquisitely finished; there is no redundancy or weakness in any single poem; but the attempt to fuse two incomplete schemes is not a complete success. . . ."—*Fortnightly Review*.

"There can, we think, be no doubt that 'The City of Dreadful Night' contains many passages of great beauty. The impress of real genius is upon it, but genius which is only likely to be appreciated by a few. . . . He is both a scholar and a thinker. In short, he writes above the heads of the multitude. In these days, in proportion to the depth of his thoughts is a poet unpopular. The most popular poet of the day is Longfellow. He numbers probably thousands of readers, where a man like Matthew Arnold has only one; but that one, let us remember, is worth all the thousands. Mr. Thomson must console himself with some such reflection. He must also remember that the poet who looks on the dark side of life is hardly likely to find so many readers as he who prophesies soft things. . . . The public, on the other hand, like to be told that nothing is more certain than their oracle, and any one who doubts a single word of it is at once denounced as an Atheist. One of the finest of Mr. Thomson's poems after 'The City,' is an allegory of 'The Naked Goddess.' The poem is not merely marked by great beauty both of thought and felicity of language, but by a quaint, subtle humour, which is a characteristic of many of Mr. Thomson's pieces. The most beautiful part, however, of the allegory, is the incident of two little children, a boy and a girl, who come to the goddess, and beg to live with her in the wood. . . .

"Another equally beautiful allegory is 'Hebe.' It tells how nature offers to us all a cup of nectar to drink, but how we all of us adulterate

it with poison, and are never content to drink it pure. Amongst the satirical poems, let us call especial attention to 'Virtue and Vice.' It might have taken for its motto Thackeray's saying, 'The bad do much harm, but no one knows how much evil the good do.' Lastly, the volume closes with some admirable translations of Heine, with whose genius Mr. Thomson has so much in common. Let us strongly recommend 'The City' to all who are interested in the great problems of existence. Our quotations will show how much beauty it contains. Mr. Thomson, however, cannot well be judged by quotations. His muse takes a very wide and bold sweep."—*Westminster Review*.

"It is worth while, I think, to chronicle the appearance of a new poet. Such I have little hesitation in pronouncing Mr. James Thomson, the author of 'The City of Dreadful Night, and Other Poems.' In the case of the new singer, the world has been in no hurry to listen, and the works now reprinted, or, for the first time given to the world, bear dates between 1860 and 1875. That Mr. Thomson has not the lyrical grace and tenderness of the Laureate, the fervour and splendour of Mr. Swinburne, or the fine chaste workmanship of Mr. Matthew Arnold, I concede. None the less he is a genuine singer, and has that remarkable gift to which Rivarol refers, the 'heureux pouvoir des mots qui (sillonnet) si profondément l'attention des hommes et ébranlent leur imagination.' The famous arraignment of the powers in 'Atalanta in Calydon,' or the wail in 'Felise' is not more

'Hopeless of the best
And its nugatory quest,'

than are the lines of 'Our Ladies of Death,' the poem which gives its name to the volume, and many others of Mr. Thomson's compositions. I wonder if the new-comer claims kinship with his great predecessor and namesake. (He died a bachelor?) At any rate, the similarity of name seems to have led the latter poet to supply in the 'Lord of the Castle of Indolence,' a species of continuation of the most inspired work of the earlier. Whether Mr. Thomson will ever show himself an absolute high-priest of song I wait to see. He has, at any rate, won admission into the temple."—*Sylvanus Urban* in "*Gentleman's Magazine*."

Mr. W. M. Rossetti in the Life of Blake prefixed to the Aldine edition of Blake's Poems, after quoting some passages from an Essay on Blake, written by Mr. Thomson, says :—"This is the same writer who has produced in 1874 . . . an extremely remarkable poem, of philosophical meaning and symbolic or visionary form, named 'The City of Dreadful Night.' It was preceded three or four years ago by another poem, fully as noticeable but practically unknown, entitled 'Weddah and Om el Bonain,' an Oriental story of passion and adverse fate."

“The admirers of Leopardi, of Shelley, of Richter’s ‘Dream,’ of picturesque melancholy, sonorous despair, and the sombre philosophy which finds moral consolation in Atheism—may be interested to know of a really remarkable poem lately published. . . . The spirit of the work is akin to that of Leopardi, but the writer (who uses the signature B.V.) has thought out his philosophy of the universe in more detail, and presents it by the help of wider range of illustration and imagery. The versification in places recalls Shelley more nearly than any other well-known author, but it is only a passing resemblance of the sweet flowing cadence; and in the greater part of the poem (about 1500 lines) the originality of the writer is as unquestionable as his power. The work is called ‘The City of Dreadful Night,’ and is simply a series of visions representing the despair of minds doomed by their own constitution to revolve, through a dark dream-like life, round the ruined shrines of ‘dead Faith, dead Love, dead Hope.’ But the poetical merits of the whole are quite out of proportion to the truth or morality of the principal thesis.”—*Academy*, June 6, 1874.

“The appearance of a verse-writer of real power who belongs to no school, and can hardly be called a debtor to any living poet, is a thing to be welcomed with something more than the attention commonly given to a new volume in metre. Many of us are apt to think that there is too much rhyming in the world already, and a good deal of what is published is of such a kind as to confirm this feeling. But any one who on the strength of this presumption neglects Mr. Thomson’s poems will assuredly be a loser. That his book is a small and compact one, pleasant to the hand and eye, is the least of its merits. We are speaking of Mr. Thomson as of a new poet; the truth is that most of the pieces in this volume are dated from ten to fifteen years ago, some further back still, and some few have already been published. But the scattered and casual publicity of magazines is not enough for solid reputation. To many lovers of poetry Mr. Thomson’s work will doubtless be as new as, we confess, it is to ourselves. It is well, however, to bear the facts in mind. Good poetry is in itself neither the worse nor the better for some years’ keeping, though perhaps delay may bring fitter audience. But evidence of the poet’s independence should not be lost. In this case it is right to note that some passages, which a hasty reader might set down as typical of the prevailing ‘modern’ tone, were written when the public was just beginning to discover Mr. Browning, and when Mr. William Morris, Mr. Rossetti, and Mr. Swinburne were almost or altogether unknown. . . . Mr. Thomson dedicates his book to the memory of Leopardi, and he has certainly drunk deep of Leopardi’s intense pessimism. . . . The strength of the poem lies, however, not in particular descriptions or episodes, nor yet in the construction of the whole—unless indeed a certain want of coherence and articu-

lation which we find in this be itself a designed touch of art for deepening the effect of heavy gloom—but in the sustained accumulation of thoughts and images reinforcing the dominant monotone. . . . Whether this bitterly despairing mood is really the one most congenial to the poet, is a matter on which we have no title to be curious, nor would the inquiry be relevant to the artistic merit of his work. In any case, it is not the only mood he is capable of. In ‘Sunday at Hampstead’ and ‘Sunday up the River,’ Mr. Thomson gives us two idyllic scenes full of brilliant verse and fancy. From ‘Sunday up the River’ we quote some lines on a sunrise of early summer; which, be it observed, are not mere ornamental description, but have, as all true poetic description should have, their definite function in expounding the poet’s mind. . . . There is a power in these lines which reminds one of Shelley, though there is no question of imitation. But to set them off, as is their due, the lighter verse that follows ought also to be quoted. Indeed, frequent transitions of tone and metre are a marked feature of the poem, which is not so much a single idyll as a *Liederkreis*. ‘The naked Goddess’ is a legend or allegory for every reader to interpret as he will. To many it will seem strange, to some foolish; those who know Blake will breathe in it a familiar air. Either Mr. Thomson has caught inspirations from Blake for this poem (and caught them very well), or it is a singular coincidence of poetical temper. Another piece to be specially mentioned, as showing at its best Mr. Thomson’s command of verse and diction, is ‘The Lord of the Castle of Indolence.’ It is dated 1859, and it is strange to learn now that twenty-one years ago there was among us unknown a writer who could produce such lines as these. . . . We have shown as much of Mr. Thomson’s poetic style as can fairly be shown in the space of a review. It has the first and best mark of genuine poetry, the directness and large simplicity which seem to make discussion impossible. The words are not built or driven together, but come in their places as if it were the most natural thing for them to do, and they could not help it. This quality of Mr. Thomson’s work reminds us now and then of Wordsworth, we mean in his happier vein, when he is naturally and truly simple, not in the pieces where he affects a forced and bald rusticity. Mr. Thomson includes in his volume some modestly entitled ‘Attempts at Translation from Heine.’ They are very good, but their interest is rather dimmed by the company in which they appear. Plenty of people are always ready to translate Heine more or less tolerably—and well enough, perhaps, for those who cannot read the original. But such verse as that of ‘The Lord of the Castle of Indolence’ is not to be had to order, or to be met with every day. We hope that we may one day expect from Mr. Thomson, not more finished work, for that we could hardly desire, but something framed on a scale and with a continuity of design which shall give his powers ampler scope.”—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

“The author has high gifts. . . . These are mainly a directness, brilliance and vigour, such as we see in Ebenezer Elliott, without his ill temper, and with a native melody, and a sense of beauty, such as the Corn-Law Rhymer never showed. . . . This makes us look forward with no small interest to Mr. Thomson’s next volume.”
—*Athenæum*.

“The present volume of verse is an unusually interesting one, testifying, indeed, to a certain lack of range in the author’s thought, and to a concentration of his ideas upon certain riddles which the wise indifference of the wise is apt to leave unattempted, but singularly melodious in expression, dignified and full of meaning, and bearing witness to reading as well as to meditation. . . . The [leading] poem ends with two descriptively allegorical passages of extreme beauty. The one is a vision of a sphinx and an angel, who face each other, undergoing metamorphoses as the spectator gazes, so that the angel, at first armed and winged, loses his wings, then his sword, and then falls prostrate at the feet of the unchanging sphinx. The other is a description of the ‘Melencolia’ not unworthy to be inscribed as a legend under the print itself. But it is exceedingly rare to find a volume, in which so large a number of the pieces contained have a distinct and individual poetic attractiveness. . . . That he has what somebody once called a fine gloomy imagination is not contestable, and, fortunately, he is not always given up to it. His book, if it were ever possible to induce Englishmen to buy poetry except as they buy wine—not because of its goodness, but because of the name of the seller—ought to be widely read. . . . On the whole, the interest and attraction of the volume are of the most considerable, though we cannot help wishing that Mr. Thomson had read Shakespeare more, and Leopardi less.”—*Academy*.

“‘In the Room,’ a dialogue between the articles of furniture in a darkened and unopened room, leading at last to the disclosure that the occupant is lying dead upon the bed, having died by his own hand, has a fine gradual horror, which is masterly in its way; while the poems entitled ‘Sunday at Hampstead,’ and ‘Sunday up the River’ strike us as being as fresh and original as anything we have read for a considerable time. . . . Such songs as ‘Drink! Drink! Open your Mouth,’ and ‘As we Rush, as we Rush in the Train,’ have the best singing quality, and do no small credit to their author.”—*Notes and Queries*.

“It is a certainty that Mr. Thomson is a poet. He is not a writer of verses merely. Whoever has read this strangely powerful volume must feel that it is not to be dealt with with that ever-rising flood of recent verse. He is no imitator, no writer of polished lines inspired by Wordsworth, or Mr. Tennyson, or Mr. Swinburne, who has so much sham poetry to answer for. Here we have the note of

genuine poetic feeling, and the medium of communication in the most exquisitely skilful and vigorous verse. Not since the days when Mr. Swinburne and Mr. Morris startled the reading world has any volume called forth more decided and sterling praise than this one before us. Each piece in it is dated, and it is curious to observe that many of the finest poems were written before the Mr. Swinburne and Mr. Morris aforesaid were known. . . . Mr. Thomson is a poet of despair, a pessimist of the most determined character; and he has appropriately dedicated his volume to the Italian Leopardi (B. V.'s translations of Leopardi's fine prose were a striking feature in the democratic journal above mentioned), who somewhere says that 'all is a mystery except our grief.' The longest piece in the book, 'The City of Dreadful Night,' is nothing but an allegorical representation of the misery and hopelessness of human life. It is fragmentary, and far from perfect as a whole; but its constituent parts are of singular beauty, and some passages need fear no comparison. We only wish we could quote some of it, but it is impossible in the space at our disposal to show our readers as much as shall not do injustice. . . . 'The Naked Goddess' is a fine allegory, showing how they drive off the Goddess of Nature who seek to clothe her in the garments of our city life. . . . One of the most beautiful for wealth of imagery and symbolism, and ease of construction, is 'The Lord of the Castle of Indolence.' . . . The two idylls, 'Sunday up the River' and 'Sunday at Hampstead,' are grotesque and intentionally vulgar, and at times abounding in passages of great beauty. . . . Mr. Thomson is a thorough democrat and proud of his class, yet his true sphere is a high one, and he returns naturally to a lofty tone of keen poetic insight. The two idylls contain some of the finest pieces in the volume. He has also a touching, tender little poem to Mrs. Browning, which is matchless. . . . He appends to his own verse what he modestly calls 'Attempts at Translation from Heine.' Certainly no poem is translatable exactly from one language into another; but we think Mr. Thomson has succeeded extraordinarily well. Those who cannot read German will never get a better notion of one of Heine's little gems than from this translation. . . . It is impossible to lose less of the magic of Heine's verse than Mr. Thomson has. But we must now leave him. It is long since we have met with such a poetic talent as his. Our only regret is that it should be married to what we cannot help considering an erroneous view of life. But it is ungrateful to quarrel with a writer who has provided us with such an artistic treat as is afforded to us by this splendid volume."—*Lloyd's Weekly Times*.

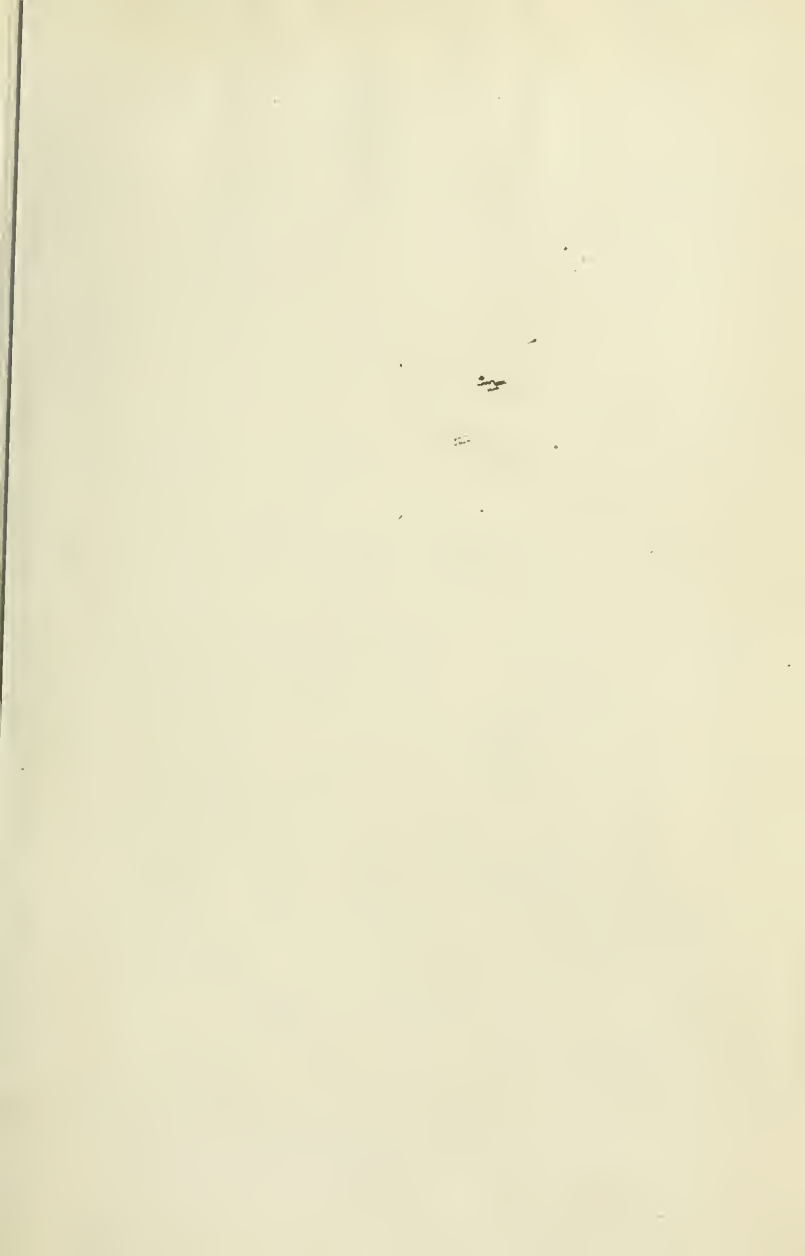
"Occasionally, as in 'Virtue and Vice,' Mr. Thomson is bitterly defiant of conventional piety and conventional propriety; and in this mood his verse is always vigorous, though perhaps unnecessarily morbid. The two finest poems in the volume—equal throughout in the perfection of their workmanship and structure, and noble in the

ideas they embody—are the ‘Naked Goddess,’ a splendid allegory, and ‘L’Ancien Régime,’ which is a scathing denunciation of the old Continental Monarchical system.”—*Scotsman*.

“Some years ago extracts appeared in various newspapers from a poem entitled ‘The City of Dreadful Night,’ which had been published under the signature of ‘B. V.’ in a periodical devoted to ‘advanced’ opinions of various kinds. . . . ‘The City of Dreadful Night’ contains passages which for command of imagery and language few living poets need refuse to sign. The ‘everlasting no’ has not often been pictured in words of more skilfully arranged hues and style, and the only thing perhaps that the poem lacks is a certain simplicity and spontaneity which are too often absent in contemporary verse, as well as the directness and breadth of theme which are also among the crying wants of modern poetry. At the same time no critic can afford to slight such evidence of power over words and thought as the closing stanzas of ‘The City of Dreadful Night’ afford in the allegorical pictures of the sphinx and the angel, who face each other till the latter is transformed and passes away wholly, and in the transcript into words of ‘the melencholia that transcends all wit.’ The latter in especial is a *tour de force* of wording which in verse will fairly support comparison with Mr. Pater’s handling of the same subject in prose.”—*Manchester Guardian*.

“James Thomson has put forth a volume of verse of unusual merit and originality, under the title ‘The City of Dreadful Night,’ which is the subject of the principal poem in the collection. The author shows a peculiar genius for allegory and symbolism.”—*The Union*, New York.

“Some little time ago a volume of poems was published with the curious title of ‘The City of Dreadful Night.’ It was well received at the time, but it has been steadily growing into favour ever since, and just now it is very much talked about. Several eminent literary men, under whose notice the volume has been brought, have been much impressed by it, and its author, Mr. James Thomson, is getting a marked reputation for poetic power. . . . In ‘Sunday at Hampstead’ and ‘Sunday up the River,’ the author draws a picture of humble life with its enjoyments and its vague poetry, which is quite fresh in literature and very delightful after the terrible affectations through which poetry has been passing for so many years. . . . Of all this sort of nonsense there is nothing in Mr. Thomson’s poetry, which is fresh, and follows no school. The influence of Heine may be here and there detected, as in the following poem on ‘Art,’ with its graceful thoughts. . . . There is a thoughtful and imaginative quality in this, which has been long wanting to our minor poetry.”—*East Anglian Daily Times*.



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